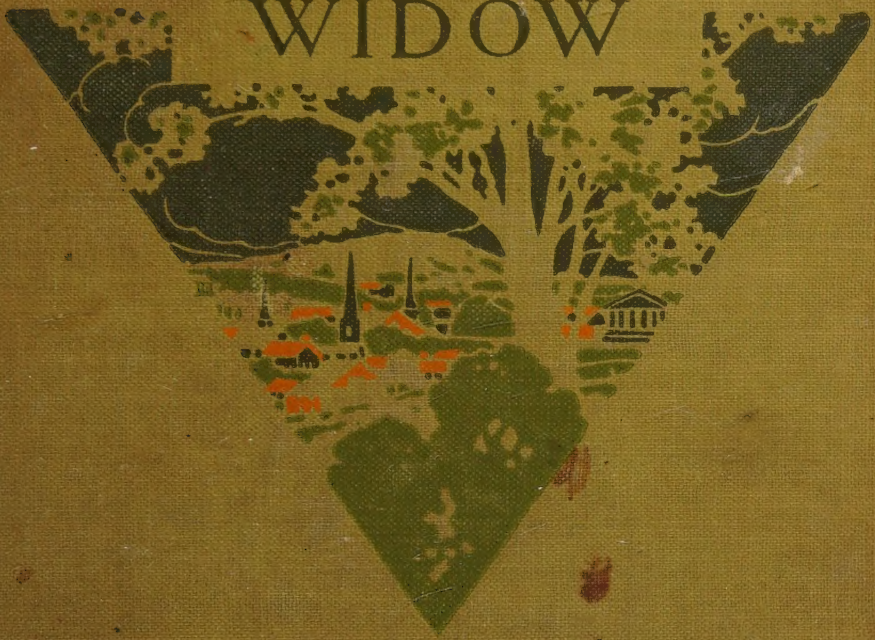
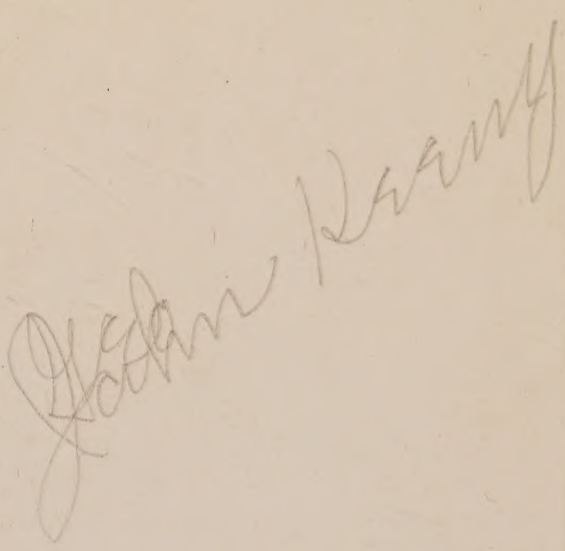
# A CIRCUIT RIDER'S WIDOW



CORRA HARRIS



# A CIRCUIT RIDER'S WIDOW

By CORRA HARRIS

*Illustrated by Walter H. Everett*

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To

FAITH HARRIS LEECH

WITHOUT WHOSE HELP AND SYMPATHY THE INCIDENTS AND MEMORIES RECORDED IN THIS VOLUME COULD NOT HAVE BEEN WRITTEN

# A CIRCUIT RIDER'S WIDOW

# A Circuit Rider's Widow

## CHAPTER I

I WAS born in Berton. This is an old middle Georgia town. When I was a child it was a crossroads village at the bottom of a long and very high hill.

My earliest recollections are not of this place, nor of my father's house, nor even of myself, but they are of the travellers who came and went upon the road over this hill. When a man appeared on top of it he was a mysterious and glorified figure dividing the horizon, coming out of the unknown. When one disappeared over it, he was lost to me; I grieved for him as if I should never see him again. I believed secretly and after the sublime manner of children that the next world lay beyond it and the thunderhead clouds which passed above it as often as men did. They were all of the same company, these travellers and these clouds, bound, for all I knew, upon the same journey. I feared what might be on the other side of that hill as young mortals fear immortality.

There was a wide, white place in the town where the roads crossed. A post with a board nailed near the top stood there. A hand, rudely painted, pointed to the printed sign on the board:

THIS IS THE WAY TO MILL OR FERRY—
GO IT, TRAVELLER, SAD OR MERRY

I believed in this signpost as if it had life, for I cannot remember when it did not lean kindly sidewise toward the mill and the ferry, as if it had a personal and friendly interest, urging the traveller literally in the right direction.

The only church in Berton then was called Olive-Vine. It belonged to the Primitive Baptists, and stood upon the opposite side of the road from the signpost, very old and brown, with a little chicken-coop belfry on top.

I entertained a violent animosity toward this edifice. Having heard some criticism of Primitive Baptist doctrines, I associated the danger of infant damnation with it, also a scourge of frightfully cold water. Being still very young, I did not know if I should escape the fate of the unfortunate infants born to be damned. As a small child I remember standing close to the friendly signpost and staring with horror and suspicion at the cavernous doors of Olive-Vine Church, which were always yawning wide open for me.

The only other recollection I have of my early childhood is that I was conscious of having a terrible thing inside me—a soul—that I was dead in my trespasses and sins—which was very hard upon my soul—and that I must be born again. If I was not born again I must burn forever in a very hot place, the name of which I must never pronounce. I feared the long hill, because beyond it somewhere were all the dangers of this future state. I watched and suspected the Primitive Baptist Church because it seemed possible that I might be caught in the baleful influence which emanated from it and have to be baptized in the mill pond, which was very cold water. I was a poor little worm of the dust, wriggling in the torments of my own imagination. It is the fate of most children one way or another.

All this was long ago, directly after the Civil War, when the losses and hardships of that terrible struggle drove the people of the South to take the vow of involuntary poverty and look more particularly to God for salvation.

Since those days Berton has climbed the long hill, one house at the time, until now the whole town is up here except Olive-Vine Church and the few people who still belong to it. The membership is smaller than it was, but not less loyal. I think the warm, debilitating climate of middle

Georgia is unfavourable to Primitive Baptists. It is not because their doctrines are narrower than those of other denominations, but I have observed, in my long life among church people, that the quality of the man often determines the creed by which he chooses to live. The Primitive Baptists all have honest, cold-weather spirits. They take their religion as the earth takes a hard frost. They freeze to Almighty God, and lift their strong hearts like naked boughs to the inclement climate of this present life. This is why the great body of the membership of that church is to be found in the mountains of north Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. They have the frontiersman's instinct and ask no softness of salvation.

Meanwhile, here in Berton on the hill there are fifteen hundred people, three churches, and eight Episcopalians. When the Methodists have a pastor who prays, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," the eight Episcopalians worship in this church. But if we have one who says, "Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors," they attend to their devotions privately and do not come to church at all.

I do not remember whether the old signpost was removed when the mill was washed away in a

spring freshet and the ferry was abandoned for a bridge across the little river, or whether it finally fell to the earth and was no more, like a good man whose days of usefulness are passed. And I do not recall whether we were the first or among the last to move in to new Berton. These are annals of a former existence. I have set them down here as an old woman may sometimes show the daguerreotype of the child she was, wondering herself at the face of that child, recalling dimly the thoughts which the child had and which no one else knew.

When I was seventeen years of age I was converted and joined the Methodist Church. I experienced what was called in those days a "sky-blue" conversion. That is to say, I was under conviction for sin. I suffered remorse, and I could not have felt more the pardoning power of grace if I had committed every transgression. I was, in fact, an innocent young girl brought up in the strictest manner by Christian parents. Yet the Old Adam seed of all wickedness was in me. It was not until I was willing to renounce these sins, which I had never committed, give up everything, and consecrate my life absolutely to the service of God, that I received the blessing and literally was conscious of having passed from death into eternal life.

Looking back through the many years which have passed since then, I can still see the girl I was, kneeling in deep contrition before the altar with other penitents. I remember with compassion grown old and gray the anguish of my soul, the awful fears I had of leaving the life I had lived for this new life, so shriven of all my familiar thoughts and desires.

I can hear still the rumble of many prayers about that altar, as the elder Christians put into words the sorrows and terrors we could not name; the shuffling of many feet as the congregation arose from its knees. And then the words of this hymn filling all the darkness of the night with a softened sweetness:

*Jesus, I my cross have taken,*
*All to leave, and follow Thee;*
*Destitute, despised, forsaken,*
*Thou, from hence, my all shalt be:*
*Perish every fond ambition,*
*All I've sought, or hoped, or known;*
*Yet how rich is my condition!*
*God and heaven are still my own.*

I am unable to say how or why these words opened for me the casements through which I beheld the right vision of myself. I was neither despised nor forsaken except in some deep spirit-

ual sense. I had no "fond ambitions," yet suddenly, as these words passed like invisible wings above me, I was able to renounce the guilt of ambition, of all worldly pleasures, all the doubtful things I had not yet "sought or known."

I am no juggler in spiritual forces. I have never studied psychic phenomena. All I know is that when I arose from the altar as the last words of the hymn died upon the air, I saw the faces of men and women whom I had known all my life—and they were different. I was drawn to them by a strange intelligence. I knew their secret sorrows. I believed in them as I never had believed, with a love and understanding far beyond my years or wisdom in these matters.

No one who has had this experience can doubt that there is such a thing as conversion, by whatever name they may choose to call it. And only those who have accepted this new life and endeavoured to live accordingly know of the dangers, the deceits, the cunning hypocrisies which beset it from within and without. We are not delivered who cry "Saved! Saved!" We have only enlisted in a longer, fiercer struggle to live again immortally well. Salvation is not free. It costs every man and every woman all that he has and the whole of his life.

Shortly after my conversion I was married to

William Thompson. He was a Methodist preacher, in the active ministry. We had the poorest mountain circuits for two years. During that period we must have produced a dozen volumes of unwritten but hard-earned scriptures, practising the Beatitudes on saints and sinners and trying to live on two hundred and forty dollars a year.

Then William's health failed, or maybe it was his spirit. I do not know which it was, but something gave way in him that made it impossible for him always to have the "witness of the spirit" even when he was doing the best he could, and that made it still more impossible for him to endure the hardships of the itineracy.

But he never gave up the ministry. He "located," as we say in the Methodist Church. We went back to Berton, where he taught school and preached wherever a sermon was needed, which was nearly every Sunday to the day of his death. A local preacher is the poor kin of the church. He must do everything the other preachers or the bishop or the people demand of him. But he is never paid for his services. If any man deserves more credit than another in heaven for his ministry it must be the local preacher, because this is the only reward he can hope to receive.

We lived together twenty-five years here in

Berton. For the last ten years I have been his widow. And during all these thirty-five years I have been what is known as a church worker. I have done everything from urging sinners to forsake the error of their ways to holding the office of president of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies. I have conducted vesper services for women, have led in prayer. I have fed the hungry, visited the widow and orphan in affliction, nursed the sick, prepared the dead for burial. I have lived in love and charity with my neighbours when it was not my Christian duty to make war upon them. And I have forgiven them as often as they have forgiven me. If any one has kissed me on one cheek I have been quick to turn the other—quick being the most descriptive term there is of me. I never had any worldly amusements. But now that I have set myself to tell the truth, I admit I often wished for strictly worldly diversions. I have had a gnawing curiosity all my life to see a play in a theatre, to hear great and sinful music. I have wanted to dine with wine on the table. I do not care for intoxicants. The old Adamess in me just wanted to look upon the wine when it worketh itself aright in the cup. I have permitted myself to wonder if it really would be wrong to play cards if there were no stakes, the same as the

best Christians play croquet. Above all—and I do not know how to account for this depravity—I have always wanted to see a horse race. I have reasoned with myself in vain about this. Why a horse race? Why did not my thoughts choose some transgression more in keeping with my character as a church member, like raffling off a quilt for the benefit of the heathen, or speculating on fifty cents for a month to see how much of the deficit in the preacher's salary I could win. None of these ever appealed to me. I can look my Heavenly Father in the face and say that I never gambled for any Christian cause. It was with me a horse race or nothing. And I reckon I have known all my life that soon or late I would yield to this temptation.

If the people in our church, who have known me since I was young and fair through these many years when I have been growing old and wrinkled and kind and tired into everlasting patience; if they could see me, the woman inside, often looking through her strictly Christian life as a prisoner looks through the bars at the green and pleasant world, I do not know what they would have thought. Sometimes I feared that William suspected me, when we were sitting together in the evening after the day's work was done. There would be a bright beam in his eye, gently accusa-

tive, like a saint winking at his own human nature, when he'd seen me lay aside the paper and sigh. I always read the theatrical news. And I reckon I know the speed of every horse that has run a race in this country since the days of Maude S. I cannot even yet resist the sporting page of a newspaper. Maybe William knew this. I doubt if there is much between husband and wife which is not known to both. They are continually glozing over each other's sins and denying each other's virtues, though they keep an accurate record of both.

But William had the advantage of me in the gratifying of his Adam instinct for just life minus morals. He was a teacher as well as being a preacher. For his own pleasure he read Latin and Greek literature. I doubt if there was a single vice practised by the ancient Romans which was unknown to him. I have heard him deliver a sermon on "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," when he had been studying the pagan civilization of Byzantine every night during the previous week. I never doubted his sincerity. I am not accusing him. I merely say that he had the advantage of me when it came to nourishing his human nature with the ins and outs of former human nature. There is a great body of literature of the same kind pub-

lished for Christian people, especially women, dealing with social work among the poor. The scenes are generally laid in the slums of great cities. And it contains the details of every crime and vice practised by the lowest classes of society. The most erotic novel sold from beneath the counter of a bookstore does not contain any story so informing of evil, so suggestive of perverted passions, as these books, which are recommended to Christian workers and which are avidly read by women whose minds would shrink from a limpid romance of love, if some one in the tale who should not kissed some one who could not help it.

I never did any of the things one of me was always wanting to do—not then, afterward; I will tell of it at the proper place in this record. My strength then consisted in the idea that though it might not be wrong to go to the theatre, it was a sin to break the vow I had taken when I joined the church. And the Methodist vow, which excludes all worldly amusements, is definite and stringent. I have lived according to this creed. I never questioned any of the doctrines of our church, except that of apostasy. I have seen many apostates, but I do not believe apostasy is obligatory or that the Holy Spirit ever forsakes a man.

It has never been any effort for me to accept the miracles recorded in the Bible. If I cannot swallow them literally I turn them inside out and swallow them spiritually. They who have seen a man, capable of any crime, with perverted appetite, with a long and dissolute life behind him, forsake the error of his ways, his evil thoughts, live and die like a saint, have seen the greatest miracle of all. The fact that a lame man walked or a blind man received his sight is tame in comparison with that. I have seen this happen too often to question any easier miracle like Jonah's involuntary triumph over the whale. And it is not that I believe in the doctrine which teaches the divinity of Jesus because it is a doctrine; but when men and women accept Him as the way, the truth, and the light, I believe in His divinity because such people do become divinely good.

I have never read a book on theology or social or political economy. I am only a little old sundown woman living inside one church in a little old sundown town. I do not know why in all this time I have not acquired a wider vision of the world, the institutions and ideals which make the world what it is. I do not know why this town, situated as it is in a fertile section near the limitless water power of a river, and blessed with a good climate, has not become a large and wealthy city

with many factories and other industries. But it has not. Sometimes I think the explanation is that the scenes of our souls are laid in another world, not this one. So Berton with its fifteen hundred people built four churches and supports them out of its very limited means, instead of building factories and growing rich from the dividends. That looks bad, but after all it may not be so bad as it looks—it depends upon your standard of values. If we really are citizens of a far country, only sojourners here, what is the wisdom of acquiring riches in this present world and subjecting ourselves to the temptations of wealth, which put us through the eye of a needle into the kingdom of heaven—very attenuated, if we squeeze through at all?

As for me, I have studied just two things for more than thirty years—the will of God and the heart of man—with the Bible on my knees and a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles on my nose. A man who has lived in the world can tell me more of what goes on there than I ever dreamed of. But you cannot tell me much that I do not know already about the inside nature of just the one man and the one woman. It matters not whether he is scholar, philosopher, saint or criminal, he is bound to be a man. And when you reduce him to that everlasting formula he is equal to

the same temptations, to the same capacities for doing good or evil. He may show or conceal more or less of what is in him, but the very heart of him is the same as that of my neighbour across the street. And if I could tell what I know about him it wouldn't differ much from that of the greatest man or the meanest man living.

The biggest, most important thing I have known anything about is the Methodist Church. I can remember when we had "class meetings," and literally told each other what was the matter with our souls, and when we prayed for each other by name. That was long ago, when I was a young woman. Somebody was always on the sick list spiritually then, and strangely candid about his suspicions of himself. I shall never forget Brother Elrod's trouble, which he disclosed with morbid anguish at one of these meetings. I remember it because the point he made caused as much disturbance in this town as would to-day some new theory of socialism. The men discussed it on the streets, grew heated in their arguments and fell out with one another. Women looked one another in the face and silently put the same question, though it was too delicate and nearly kin to our secret convictions concerning our real state for us openly to embarrass each other with it.

Brother Elrod was a very tall, gable-headed man, narrow through the shoulders and extremely perpendicular up to his long neck, upon which he literally hung his head. This head was fringed, but not covered, with wisps of red hair. He wore a goat-shaped beard upon his chin which was also flaming red. He was astonishingly homely, and always looked at you with a mild, pleasing expression as if he knew something good about you. The trouble with him was that he had more brains than he knew how to use. This is a very common affliction, and is incurable in most people. He had an analytical, ingrowing mind which often backed him into purely imaginary difficulties.

Upon this particular occasion we assembled in the church one night for class meeting, a dozen men and women, sitting in the brown shadows which the lamps in brackets on the wall defined but could not dispel. We began by singing "His Loving Kindness, Oh, How Great." Then some one led in prayer. After that came the "experiences."

In those days the test of Christian character and fortitude was this, that a man should be willing to do anything for Christ's sake. One of the elder members of the class had something to say about that. He put the question to us

squarely and bade us search our hearts before we answered.

There was a moment of silence while we sat looking up at him, standing before us like an old prophet in the gloom, with his long white beard flowing down and his eyes fixed upon us. Suddenly there was a shuffling of feet behind us. Brother Elrod arose two seats back, as if he had reasons for a spiritual quarantine against those present.

"Brother Wimberly," he began dolorously, "you've hit the nail on the head so far as I'm concerned. And I ask the prayers of all Christian people that I may have the courage to get through this trial of my faith."

We turned about and stared at him. He stood with both hands resting upon the back of the seat in front of him, head bowed and the bald gable of it glistening at us.

"What is your trouble, Brother Elrod?" asked Brother Wimberly.

"Just what you mentioned a while ago. There's one thing I ain't willing to do or to be for the Lord," he answered wofully.

We were astonished. Everybody in the church recognized John Elrod as a thoroughly consecrated man. Naturally we wondered what dark temptation had assailed the soul of this saint.

"Can you mention it, brother, the thing that's in the way?" asked Wimberly solemnly after a pause.

"I don't know if I can make you understand, but it's mighty near driven me crazy since I first thought of it a week ago," the stricken man began. He hesitated, and then blurted out: "It's this—I ain't willing to be a fool for Christ's sake. I'm—I'm brain proud, Brother Wimberly, that's what I am, and I never knowed a thing about it until the thought struck me when I was searching myself one day just to see if I was all right."

"But the Lord don't require of any man that he should be a fool if he kin help it!" gasped Wimberly.

"I know he don't, but that ain't the p'int. If he was to demand of me that I should appear a fool before my neighbours—well, I just couldn't do it. So it comes to the same thing," he answered.

Brother Wimberly was so taken aback by the shrewdness of this reasoning that he groaned. But William, who was sitting beside me, let out a laugh as he reached back over the benches for Elrod's hand.

"Well, don't let that bother you any more, Brother Elrod," he said, "for you have done it anyhow, even if the Lord doesn't require it of you. You've made a fool of yourself before us

all here to-night. Your conscience ought to be satisfied."

Strange to relate, it was. We heard no more of Elrod's "brain pride," although the hairsplitting point he raised furnished the occasion for many arguments. Morbid introspection like this finally led to the abolishment of class meetings, but in those days we had many men and women who were literally consecrated to the Christian life. I remember when a pastor was considered the only fit man to conduct his revival services. And we had revivals, even if it took him six weeks to stir the people up and bring them to the annual realization of their backslidden condition.

Then came a period when we imported a professional evangelist with his own singers and exhorters. I may be narrow and bigoted, but I never prized these outside hired labourers in the Lord's vineyard. They seem to dispense a sort of patent-medicine salvation which fools you but does not really cure you of your sins. If your own pastor, who knows your downsittings and uprisings, your every-day-in-the-year weaknesses and faults, cannot awaken you to a sense of your lost and undone condition, it is a sign that he lacks courage or faith, or that you just naturally prefer your sins—in which case the professional evangelist may induce you to claim an easy re-

demption. But we who live with you and deal with you after the singing and shouting is over know you are not really cleansed of your transgressions.

In these latter years there has been a reaction against travelling evangelists. And I have seen the Berton Methodist Church divided by the bitterest feud between members who wanted Bob Somebody to come and revive them, and those who would rather die in their transgressions than to be converted by an imported preacher.

It seems that we must be divided by something. There was a time when people quit the church because the stove was put in the left-hand side of the church instead of in the middle where they wanted it. I have known this town to be like two armed camps after an unusually successful revival held by the Methodists because most of the converts joined the Baptist Church. I cannot tell how many times I have seen that happen. After we'd struggled through maybe a six weeks' revival, after we'd led them to the altar and wrestled for them night after night in prayer, it did seem ungrateful to call our bluff that way. For Methodists hold that the chief thing is to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it makes no difference what church you join. Still, I have known half the Christian workers among the Methodists

here to backslide with righteous indignation when we were put to this test.

When all is said and done, the most varied and exciting life in this world is that of a Christian, provided you keep up with the way your neighbours live it and the ingenuous ways they manage to slip through and rest from living it. I have never been backward in this kind of enterprise. When your world is narrowed down to one town and to one church in that town, you do not study geography of nations; you study your neighbour, and you know him, if you can, even better than he knows you. I reckon I am about as well acquainted with Berton and the people in it as the Recording Angel is.

With the exception of those two years we had in the itineracy, I have always lived there, never been anywhere unless it was to attend a revival or a missionary meeting. The only change of scenes I had for thirty years was just a change of pastors in our church. Every time a new preacher comes he brings a new setting for the same old gospel. One magnifies the glory of God, another His infinite mercies. One cries, "Repent! Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Another founds his ministry upon this: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Now and then we get an old cross-

grained Isaiah who preaches with the red-hot coals of fire from the bottomless pit and scares some of the worst sinners into the fold literally smoking from their narrow escape. It all comes to the same thing. I never worry as some do about whether they can or cannot agree with what the pastor said in his morning sermon. I know by long experience that all kind of preachers are needed to win all the different kinds of sinners, and even then the sinners seem to increase faster than the saints.

The thing I am trying to say is this—that the preachers come and go. Some of them have been with us a year, some four years, but they always left me here. And the next one always found me here, doing the same things, praying the same prayers and looking for the same reward. From being the youngest member in this church when I joined I am now the oldest. I have seen these people born, and then born again. I know them better than the pastor does, because I have known them from the beginning. And I reckon I know every one of the preachers better than the bishop does who sends them to us. For a bishop only knows each one as he appears at Conference to read his report which shows that all the collections have been paid in full. But I know how much work there is behind that report and how little of it

he did sometimes, because I know him. I have seen him in so many different guises of the Methodist itinerant. If the average pastor on a circuit was left to get up his collections without the help of the stewards and more particularly of the women, the Conference wouldn't have enough money to pay the bishops or the other connectional officers, or the various deficits which occur year after year in the church's worldly business. Here in our church the women and girls make a canvass at the end of every year to get what the pastor cannot get, enough to be able to make a good showing at Conference by paying all the assessments. I have scrimped and pinched, and done enough of this kind of mendicant service to entitle me to an iron cross. But the pastor gets all the credit. And he may be given a better charge the following year on the strength of it. It is all right, and no more than the duty we swore to perform when we joined the church. But it does seem to me that some of us are entitled at least to honourable mention in these Conference reports. This church holds the lid on its women good and tight, which doubtless makes us humble and diligent in its service. I never knew the Methodist women to get the best of the situation but once.

Some years ago the General Conference abolished our mission board, which controlled the funds

paid only by the women for missions. We felt about that much as a farmer's wife feels when her husband takes the money she made off her own cotton patch to pay his taxes. And the church pacified us much as the same man pacifies his outraged wife by giving her a fifty-cent chromo for her Christmas present. Several women were elected to a certain board in the church, which in turn elected the editor to a conglomerate church paper. But three bishops and four connectional officers were on the same board, so that the men outnumbered the women. Naturally they had chosen the man they would elect as editor, and naturally he was not the one the women wanted.

The board met. I never hope to see another such spectacle. The bishops came in, strutting like hyperboles of infallible authority. I'm not blaming them for that manner; it is thrust upon them by the church. I am just saying how they looked. And the connectional officers who accompanied them were only politely less important. They bowed to us much as you have seen a preacher bow to the front end of his congregation before he enters the pulpit. Then they took their places round the table in the middle of the room.

The women occupied a row of chairs set back against the wall. We were all widows and we wore our weeds—long black veils on our bonnets—and

the meek, long-suffering expression of our sex and condition. Every one of us had spent years in the back-aching service of the church, and this was the only reward we had ever received, the honour of sitting behind the board to which we had been elected. But you cannot trust the pale meekness of a church widow. That mourning-dove countenance may conceal the wisdom of seven serpents.

We had laid our plans, and we waited patiently during the preliminary business of the morning session, only concerned to make it last entirely through the morning by poking our noses in with irrelevant questions which required time and patience to answer. The editor then must be elected during the afternoon session. Now it came to pass that each of the bishops had received an invitation to lunch at the home of some woman prominent in church work, which invitation he guilelessly accepted. But when a bishop yields his carnal mind to the consideration of just food, he can be as carnal as anybody, and he is literally in the toils of his Delilah hostess. On this occasion every Delilah served lunch late, and then she served as many courses as her ingenuity could devise by way of detaining her guest.

The bishops were in no hurry to return for the afternoon session. They trusted those Phœbe widows of the church and took for granted that the

meeting would not be called until their return. Promptly at two o'clock we entered the room, and found just enough of the other male members waiting to make a quorum. I was the last woman to cross the threshold, and I locked the door behind me.

We called the meeting to order, stood flat-footed on our parliamentary rights, and nominated our candidate for editor. The men protested in vain for an hour's delay. They fought hard for the bishops. They implored us to wait and be guided by these great and good men. One of them rushed frantically round the room looking for a telephone. But by the grace of God there was no telephone; therefore, no way to warn the absent members of what was going forward. In spite of furious wrangling and scandalous insubordination on the part of the men, we had elected our candidate before three o'clock. When the bishops came puffing in ten minutes past the hour all was over.

As a Christian woman whose duty is to protect the reputation of saints under certain grievious provocations, I refuse to describe the scene that followed. But this incident is now a matter of history in the Methodist Church, and with the exception of unimportant details may be verified by any one mean enough to try it.

That was the first and only time I ever officiated

in the broader affairs of our denomination. I really belong to no larger sphere than this church in Berton—a little old, fat woman with a round face written all over with a script of fine wrinkles, with a noticeable chin, a slightly hooked nose, and a mouth which the years have pressed inward and downward at the corners. I wear a coronet-shaped black bonnet far back on my head and tied under my chin. I am always to be seen during Sabbath services looking up at the pastor from my seat behind the choir, as if I had heard him say that before. Always getting entirely down upon my knees when he says, "Let us pray." Always the one to rise halfway out of my seat to jog his memory, if he forgets to announce that the Woman's Missionary Society will meet the following Thursday afternoon at three o'clock. Always singing every hymn whether the choir wants me to sing or not. The last one to come out of the church after services, taking the glass vase with me so that I may remember to fill it with flowers for the next service. Speaking to every one, slightly avoided by certain members because they think I have said something about them, which would have been the truth if I had said it. Always holding my own in spite of them, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Asking Sally Peters why her mother is not at church to-day. Keeping my eye upon Mrs. Peters,

who is an emotional Christian. Reminding Mrs. Parks that she must be sure to come to the missionary meeting on Thursday, and finally asking the pastor and his wife to go home with me for dinner.

I've done this, been this, so much that if I should go to church some Sunday, sit on the back bench, fail to kneel during prayers, ignore the collection basket, let the preacher forget his announcements, refuse to put the steeple on the choir singing with my high treble, and leave at the end of the service without speaking to a single soul—I say, if I, or any one of half a dozen faithful Dorcas women in this church, acted in such a manner, it would tear this town up by the roots! Sometimes I have been tempted to do it, as an old horse is tempted to jump a fence which he knows he cannot jump. I wish I could stay home on Sunday, and not try to remember the things others forget, or perform the services others neglect. It is a thankless job, and the only reward you earn, sometimes even among the church members, is the name of being a busybody. But I could no more neglect my church duties than my housekeeping. I have two homes: this little gray cottage with its spider-legged veranda, opposite the Methodist parsonage, which also has a spider-legged veranda, and this church across the street. I don't know yet, but I believe it will be easier for any mortal to become ac-

customed to the yoke of duty than it ever will be in Paradise to balance one's light and irresponsible incorruption upon a pair of wings. I accepted the Christian life as a yoke, and it has become my habit.

Some women were born to be church members, but I was not. I doubt if I ought to admit such a thing, but I believe religion is an acquired taste with me. I still long, not for the things of the world but for the world—that wide and elastic place where you change sometimes, where you say, even if it is prayer-meeting night, "I am going to the play this evening, or to the horse show, to see something or hear something which has to do with life and joy in this world, not the other one." It is wrong to feel this way, to weary in well-doing. I am not defending myself. I am just telling the truth. And I've seen the same truth in Mrs. Parks' eyes when she stared at me like a raw-boned angel at a meeting of the Woman's Missionary Society, where we were the only members present, owing to the inclemency of the weather.

There is such a thing as a famine even in the vineyard of the Lord! For cease to like, you merely exist automatically according to your creed and your duties. That is why we need and must have revivals occasionally. They are the only kind of diversions we get in the spiritual life.

They stir up the community, excite interest and curiosity, take the screw off our emotions, energize our spiritual faculties, until we get down to the real business of plucking the motes out of our neighbour's eyes while they point accusingly at the beam in ours.

If there is one thing I believe in more strongly than the Methodist doctrines of salvation, it is an old-fashioned Methodist revival. The first service is like a meeting of the grand jury, the pastor being the twelve men on the jury, the sheriff, and the deputies. If he really knows the spiritual laws governing revivals his first sermon brings indictments against half the saints in the church. He shows by the Gospel how slothful we have been all the year, how we have failed in love and charity. He singes our hypocrisies, which do accumulate upon the Christian character like moss upon old boards, he calls us stumbling-blocks to sinners. And at the end maybe he lifts his arms like doleful wings, and cries: "How long, how long, O Lord, wilt Thy mercies endure to this faithless and perverse generation!"—meaning more particularly the stewards and the Dorcases in this church. We know he is telling the truth about us. The sinners watching with keen young eyes on the back bench know it, too. And the judgment of a sinner is dangerous for a saint. The only way you can out-

wit that is to confess your transgressions, get up then and there and go to the altar for prayer. I cannot tell how often I have seen the altar in this church black and blue with the kneeling figures of the prominent Christians at the beginning of a revival. I have been among them a hundred times myself. It always did me good to have the opportunity now and then to be absolutely honest, admit before the people that I'm only a sinner, whose chief claim upon their confidence is that I'm maneuvering in the right direction.

I have heard and read many criticisms about revivals and penitents praying before altars for the remission of sins and the strength to live right. But I never have known a single man or woman who was willing and knew how to be honest with his own soul that did it. We move through this world according to symbols, illusions, ideals, every one of them designed to indicate something invisible in reality upon which no man can put his finger and say, "That is it." The most advanced scientist who deals in nothing but facts must predicate an atom somewhere in space which he cannot prove existed. The philosopher who founds his system of thought upon materialism cannot tell why a man has something in him which thinks and believes and remembers, that is not in the beast of the field. The Christian who believes in im-

mortality and the power of God is not, to my way of thinking, more credulous than the materialist.

The point is that, having this queer something in us which looks backward into the unknown and forward into the unknown, we must have faith in something. You can squat upon the ground, feel of your stomach, and believe in the dirt and the elements of it which also make flesh. But Christians pay themselves the politeness of a better and equally reasonable faith. It is the substance of things hoped for and literally the evidence of things unseen. The materialist does the same thing. He cannot prove what he believes either, beyond a few primitive experiments he makes with the elements about him—which somebody disproves shortly afterward!

Therefore, I say, let me choose an Almighty God, and let me believe that there is such a thing as sin and such a thing as righteousness, and let me kneel at an altar, which I admit is a symbolic idea, and pray, not because the Lord would fail to do His duty by me if I didn't pray, but because prayer is an instinct of religious faith, the same as snuffling in the dirt and squeezing germs is an instinct with a blind rationalist. I do not deny that he is a benefactor, but he is no more than the saint who knows that religion is the science of the soul. Not as much, if you ask me. For what shall it profit a

man to gain the whole world, all the knowledge of the things in it, if he lose his own soul? I haven't a doubt that there is a cemetery beyond the gates of Paradise, filled with the everlasting spiritual decomposition of men and women whom the Lord himself cannot raise from the dead, because they have destroyed the instinct of immortality.

For fifty years now it has been the same thing in our church here at Berton. The North Georgia Conference meets every year in November. We usually get our old pastor back, or the new one comes somewhere round Thanksgiving. If it is the old one, he looks chastened and says he is glad to be with us another year. If he is a new one, he looks hopeful, and tries not to show his disappointment at having been sent to one of the hardest, poorest circuits in Georgia. And we put our best foot foremost, with a fruit cake in one hand and a baked turkey in the other, when we welcome him and his family. Also, we endeavoured to produce the proper deception by encouraging him to believe we do not deserve our reputation in the Conference for being a divided and difficult church, pursuing a sort of evangelical feud with all the rancour of outraged piety.

The week during which Conference is in session is one of suspense and excitement for Methodists in this town. Members who take little interest in

the church all the year are wrought up the same as the rest of us about whether our old preacher will be returned or who the new one will be. We speculate wildly, owing, I suppose, to a natural gambling instinct which nothing seems to destroy, and to the fact that we do not often have the opportunity to speculate.

Meanwhile, the wife of our present pastor, waiting in the parsonage, is on pins and needles to hear whether her husband is to be moved to another appointment. She does not know whether to pack or not to pack. But secretly, nine times out of ten, she is gathering up her things on the sly and putting them in her trunks, either because she has a feeling that "John" will get a better appointment another year, and she knows he deserves it, or because the president of the Parsonage Aid Society has told her that she should not allow the children to climb up into the new parlour chairs and stamp on the very frail bottoms of them; or she is tired of walking a kind of tightrope stretched for the pastor's wife by two factions either in the church or in the Women's Missionary Societies. She is exhausted with the struggles of keeping on friendly terms with both sides, and she knows in her heart that she has not succeeded. She knows that she has been criticised for not taking more interest in the flowers in the front yard, and maybe

for not keeping the back yard clean where the children play, and for not planting a fall garden, and for letting the Aid Society know that she has only one biscuit pan and no flour bin at all. "What's become of all the biscuit pans we've bought for the parsonage stove anyhow, and why don't she buy a flour bin if she wants one?" and so forth, and so on. No one knows how the pastor's wife hears these comments, which are made behind her dingy little back, but she always does. And we always know it, because she is invariably absent from the next meeting of the Aid Society.

I make it a rule to call on our preacher's wife often during Conference week, partly because I know she is anxious and lonesome; and partly, I reckon, because I am just a woman, and crave to know what this other woman is doing under the circumstances. If the children meet me at the door looking guilty; if, when I go into the parlour, I miss the few little things like photographs and maybe a vase which belong to her, not the parsonage, I know what she is doing—she is getting her things together, so she will be able to slam them into the boxes and trunks and be ready to move almost by the time "John" gets back from the Conference. For in the Methodist itineracy changes must be made as speedily as when the people cry, "The king is dead! Long live the

king!" One preacher hardly gets out of the parsonage door before the next preacher is on his way from the depot with his family and baggage.

But when our pastor's wife comes in to greet me, there is not on her face a trace of being ready to meet this emergency. She looks pale, tired, a trifle preoccupied. No, she was not doing anything much—just straightening up things somewhere in the house. No, she has not heard from John since he left. Oh, no indeed, they do not expect to be moved. She and John like Berton so much and everybody has been so kind! All this time I can see her eyes glancing this way and that about the room to make sure she has not forgotten anything that is just her own. And her hands are trembling, maybe with nervousness from having worked so hard at this surreptitious packing.

Saint Paul had nothing on a Methodist preacher's wife when he said he had "no continuing city." They are the reservists behind the fighting line of the ministry, always ready to get up and march to the next trench, or maybe to retreat into one out of which they advanced years ago when John was young and strong and a power in the church. The winking, leering world may say what it pleases about politics in the church, I'll not deny that. But nothing except the grace of God and the love of man can hold a preacher to the cheerful, patient

performance of his duties who was once the presiding elder of a big district, and who returns in his tired old age to the little one-horse circuit where he started, still valiant, still concerned for the souls of the next generation. And only supernatural love for her husband as well as for the church keeps the worn-out wife of such a preacher from complaining, from telling how much better off they used to be when he was pastor of such and such a rich church in the city, and the congregation gave them a trip to the Holy Land. But never yet have I heard one of them do such a thing. She may look at you sometimes dimly, as if you were not there, as if for the moment she recalled a very bright place in the past, some occasion when her husband shone as he deserved to shine, but never herself. No one ever heard of a Methodist preacher's wife shining except in his reflected glory.

Much is said these days about what is the best kind of woman, whether it is the old-fashioned lady or the new-fashioned suffragist. If no candidate for near-perfection has been elected yet, some one should nominate the Methodist preacher's wife, who has been all round and up and down the world with him until they drift back in their old age to the backwoods circuit where they started—still poor, still patient, still loving and cheerful, full of faith, doddering along to their

graves with their wings folded somewhere inside.

This church at Berton has been the place where more preachers started in the ministry, and from which more were superannuated, than almost any other in the Conference. We have done our best to welcome both kinds, and I reckon we have done a good deal toward trying their faith. Some of us dread the fledgling preacher. We have had a lot of adolescent theologues here to break into the ministry of God. And we have done it, but it has not been any too easy for them or for us.

A young preacher is almost violently sincere. He is energetic, always vis ts his people, which an older one often neglects. He usually studies hard, has no old sermons, does the best he can, but he just naturally doesn't know how. He knows his heavenly Father and where He is to be found, but I have yet to see one who knew his fellow men or where to find him when he got ready to fit the Gospel on him. His sermon, however orthodox and thoughtful, is apt to be a sort of blank cartridge fired with explosive eloquence over the heads of the people. And he is nearly always the spiritual tintype of some other great preacher in the church under whose influence he has fallen. It takes him about two years to get indignantly down to common men and their common needs. And we usu-

ally have him these two years. But when he leaves us he is a wiser, chastened man, better fitted for the ministry, although he may not be so promising as a preacher. You must take some of the promise out of a man before he can become just a good pastor and a thoroughly consecrated minister who knows how to preach the Gospel without wisdom of words.

I could write volumes about the young preachers we have had and not tell half I know. Christianity is a rarefied atmosphere in which the sturdiest saint cannot always balance himself properly. But if you want to see a zigzag course in it, pay particular attention to a young Methodist itinerant on his first circuit, with his first wife and his first baby, and not a single sermon prepared with which to start his ministry. The wife always overestimates her husband's ability, which is her bounden duty. The baby is always taken violently ill cutting his stomach and eye teeth during the summer revival season, while the father is off conducting a protracted meeting at a country church. He cannot leave a congregation of half-warmed souls just as they are beginning to repent and believe, to return home and help nurse the child. The only baby William and I ever had died, but I have helped pull many a preacher's baby through its second summer, while he was

away from home and his young wife distracted with terror and grief.

Added to these persecutions of the natural affections, the inexperienced itinerant often complicates his ministry with more conscientious scruples than any man can live up to even in the spirit. I recall Brother Smalraven in this connection. He was a nice young man, with a large head, mournful eyes and a bad complexion. He took his Scripture lessons from Isaiah, and he had a terrible way of standing up before the people with some such texts as this: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out," or if it was the right arm, "Cut it off." I reckon if we had paid any attention to him he'd have had a maimed, left-eyed congregation. He did his best and his worst to practise what he preached. He was determined not only to live up to the Gospel, but, what is harder to do, he wanted to live up to the Methodist Discipline, which among other things forbids us to do any work on Sunday that is not absolutely necessary to perform.

Most women in the church have construed this command more according to their housewifely natures than according to the letter of the law. We clean the house, make the beds, sweep the floors and cook the best meals of the week on Sunday, especially if the preacher is coming home with us that day for dinner.

It took Brother Smalraven two years to live down the indignation he stirred among the Christian women during his first round of the churches in his circuit. He would eat nothing that was prepared on the Sabbath day. Sister Massengale, from the Bethlehem neighbourhood, was so outraged about the slight he put on her table, that she came in to tell me about it with tears in her eyes.

"I stayed at home from church that day just to fix him a good dinner," she sniffed. "I had a dish of fried chicken at one end of the table and a baked ham at the other. There was four different vegetables, two kinds of pie and b'iled custard." She went on counting off the delicacies on her fingers. "And will you believe me, Sister Thompson, that man wouldn't tetch a single one of them dishes! He made his dinner off of cold salt-risen bread and water! And he looked at the other victuals as if he thought they were pisened! I never was so insulted in my life—and by my own pastor, too!"

"You know the Methodist Discipline forbids members to work on Sunday. He wants us all to come to services instead of staying at home to cook," I explained, trying to soothe her.

"Well, he can attend to his own business, which is preaching on Sunday, and the hardest work he does all the week! The next time he fills his appointment at Bethlehem, he can bring a cold snack

with him, that's what he can do. I'll never ask him to my house again!" she said, getting up and waddling out to her buggy.

Late that afternoon when I saw Brother Smalraven sitting on the parsonage porch, I beckoned him to come over. And I had it out with him.

"I am right about this thing, Sister Thompson, and I must hold to what I believe is right," he said.

"What are you here for?" I answered. "To teach these women how to go against their feelings and principles and pride, or to help and encourage them where you can in the Christian life? If you don't eat what they cook, they won't take your Gospel."

"It hurts my conscience to eat hot food on Sunday," he said, holding back.

"Well, if you are as self-sacrificing as you ought to be, you'd rather hurt your raw-boned conscience than the tender table feelings of good Christian women!" I said, knowing well I had the better of the argument.

And not being an incurable bigot, he knew it, too. After that he took what was put before him and asked no questions. Now he is a power in the church and one of the heartiest eaters in the North Georgia Conference—which is a good deal to say, for I have seen old preachers and presiding elders so fond of chicken that I've wondered if their

taste might not come out on them in the next world with Rhode Island Red wings.

Sometimes a young preacher will go to the other extreme and show the most artlessly immoral sense of morals. He will live as nicely as a girl, pay his debts, bear and forbear like a saint, and still lack common honesty.

Years ago a young preacher named Beltem was sent to us. He was a tall, handsome man, with a joyous eye and what you might call a popular presence. He was so well liked in the town that on Sundays there were as many Baptists and Presbyterians as Methodists in the congregation. They boasted that his doctrines suited them. We were pleased, of course, to have the church filled at every service and to know we had a pastor who was so much admired. But every time he preached it made just the Methodists feel queer. I have had cold chills run down my back as he took a flight off the face of the earth, accompanied by the rumbling thunder of thoughts that would have done credit to any one of the prophets. There was something awful and unnatural in the ability of a young man to preach like that.

People talked a good deal. The Presbyterians said openly that Beltem had too broad a conception of the Gospel to stay in the Methodist Church. The Baptists said he was a strictly doctrinal

preacher, and they wondered how such a man ever came to get himself called in any church but their own. The Methodists had very little to say at all. But we all had our noses to the ground and our eyes on Beltem.

One day Sister Parks and I were sitting in the church, waiting for the other members of the Woman's Missionary Society.

"Brother Beltem is a fine preacher," she said, apropos of nothing.

"He preaches the best sermons I ever heard," I answered carefully.

She flirted her eye at me, and we sat there looking at each other, measuring one another's indiscretion in the matter of free speech. But we both had too much experience to trust one another with the suspicion we had in our minds.

William preached every third Sunday for the pastor at Rosewell, who was ill, which was the same Sunday Beltem's appointment fell in Berton. So it was some time in March before William heard one of these grand sermons. I will never forget that Sabbath day. Beltem took a Beatitude for his text, made crowns and wings out of it for the whole congregation. His manner was quiet, almost conversational, but he could not have improved his language if he had chosen his words out of a Paradise lexicon. His thoughts were so

majestic you could see the cherubim marching with flaming swords beside them. At first William sat like one dumfounded, then he began to fidget. At last, when Beltem got so het up he was fairly chanting his discourse, William's face turned red. I thought he was about to do something. Fortunately Beltem closed his sermon just in time.

The moment we were back home William went to his bookcase and pulled out a volume of Phillips Brooks' sermons. There it was in plain print, every word of Beltem's discourse.

"But, William," I said, "he never was an Episcopalian until this morning. He's been a Baptist and a Presbyterian, everything but a Methodist! Where'd he get the other sermons?"

We found them all, some in Moody's book of sermons, two or three in Talmage's. Our people were no great readers in those days. Even if they had been, I doubt if they would have chosen pulpit literature. So no one recognized the canned gospel we had been getting.

William went to call on Brother Beltem that evening. He did not return until near midnight.

"We'll have our own pastor for better or for worse after this," he said as he put out the light.

And we did. The next third Sunday Parker Beltem preached a poor little, runty sermon. But it was his own. And William shouted "Amen!"

every chance he got, which encouraged the boy. As the year passed he improved until he did very well. But he has never risen in the Conference, still serving small churches according to his ability. I have always had a great respect for him.

These are only two of the twenty-nine pastors we had during these last thirty-five years. I served under them all until I became a sort of setting hen in the church. The preachers whooped and exhorted. The people sang "O Lord, revive us!" But nothing happened. We had passed into a kind of spiritual dotage. When the devil forsook us, as if he were tired of tempting us into the same old transgressions, we settled down in our piety and feuds, and I never expected any change in these conditions. The fact that they were changed suddenly and completely inspired me to tell the tale I am about to write. What I have written is merely the background against which the events show. If any reader takes offense let him prefer charges against the pastor who finally shook up the dry bones of the Methodist saints in Berton. This narrative is not a book of scriptures, but the biography of a preacher and his people.

THE FAMILY HISTORY OF A CHURCH

## CHAPTER II

IF THE widow called Dorcas, and known as a "disciple" in the Church at Joppa, could have written one chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we should know more about church work among the laity of that period. If Phebe had written her experiences in the Church at Cenchrea we should know more than we do about Saint Paul. She would have made it her business to find out what that "thorn in the flesh" was which has puzzled so many commentators; and she would have told us. As the women in this church discuss our presiding elder, she would have written about Paul—how he looked; his favourite psalms; what the congregation thought of his sermon. But she never could have remembered what he said. This may explain why there is no Book of Dorcas, no Gospel According to Phebe—even in the Apocrypha. Being women, they would have told too much not essential to salvation but most awfully faithful to just the personal lives of the Apostles.

And I reckon this is the reason even to this day there are no church histories written by women.

They know how too well. We should get the truth; all the thumb marks of human imperfections on the brethren's perfections. If Susannah Wesley had written the early history of Methodism she might have omitted John Wesley's rules, which are now the vows we take when we join the church; and she never would have thought of putting in his sermons, which all young itinerants must memorize before they are received into "full connections." But she would have told the troubles her son John had with his wife; how difficult he found it to curb the ardour of his field preachers; what an awful time her son Charles had when composing his hymns; how hard they both worked; what privations they endured—and so forth and so on. It would not have been a history of Methodism at all, but a tender biography of her sons.

I am not complaining, you understand. But I say it is queer, when you consider how much more active women are and always have been in the service of the Christian religion, that they never do get the chance to tell what they know about the church and the brethren—which is a sight more than any one suspects—except the Almighty.

If the women in this church at Berton could compare notes with Dorcas of Joppa, and Martin Luther's wife, and Susannah Wesley, we should

find a remarkable similarity in our experiences. Conditions, customs, and creeds vary from age to age; but there are two ever-conflicting forces that do not change at all—the nature of human nature, and the spirit of Christianity.

We have served our time in this church with passionate, headstrong preachers just as devoted to the ministry of Christ, according to their ability, as Paul was, and about as hard to get on with as John and Barnabas found him to be when they went off with him on a missionary journey. We have had young ones like Timothy—gentle, patient, not so effective; delicate enough to take a little blackberry cordial for their stomach's sake during the summer season of bowel complaints. We have had just as good saints here as anybody's saints. We get the same kind of jades, too, occasionally, who inspired Paul to order the women at Corinth to cover their heads—meaning really their scandalous faces, I believe—and keep silent in the church. But, with us, she always gets in the choir, where her head covering shows to a better advantage than the dingy bonnets of good women, and where she makes the music and the worst troubles we have.

Within the church we also have our humble publican, seated far back, who wears on his sorrowful face the Lord-be-merciful-to-me-a-sinner

expression, which endears him to us more than the virtues of some of our hardened saints.

I am about to write a little history of our church at Berton. It will be a family history, because I am a woman and can rarely remember more than the text of last Sunday's sermon.

If any one wishes to know why I am doing this let him look inside his own church; not as a stranger, who sees rows of men and women seated in a kind of Christian relaxation, taking a Sabbath rest from secular life, but as every one of us knows each other—in the simplicity of faith and in the hard struggle to do right according to our perversities.

That is one reason. Here is another: Public opinion is a Grand Jury that brings an indictment every hundred years or so against whatever is wrong, whether it is our Government, social institutions, or the Christian Church. All revolutions and reforms are preceded by these indictments. And they are brought as often against the malpractice of religion as against any other evil.

Loyola voiced such a verdict when he formed the Society of Jesus, which was a pure and devoted brotherhood. But it produced the Jesuits of the Inquisition. Martin Luther did the same thing in a different way. And the Protestants started

clean. When the Church of England returned to the pomp and circumstances of a too formal and worldly bred piety, John Wesley organized the society called Methodists. This church has prospered so much that it begins now to prosper too much. Presently the Grand Jury will sit again. There is something wrong; I do not know what it is. Sometimes I think we deceive ourselves and practise for the benefit of the church the same covetousness and greed that we condemn in the people of the world. We gratify the same instinct for wealth and cover the sin of it with the name of the Christian Church.

Anyhow, a queer true bill was returned against our Methodist Church here recently, with amazing consequences. Therefore, as one writes an epitaph to the memory of a good man, so do I now set down the story of this little meeting house and the people who made it and loved it, knowing that presently the new order must begin and former things must pass, put away as we fold the garments of the dead.

The Methodist Church in Berton is a little old gray house, with a long-necked belfry. The eaves come very low. The doors on week days are like sorrowful eyes closed in prayer for the members who may be doing what they ought not to

do. On Sundays they are wide open, like the heart of a good man. The bell in the belfry is not too loud; one of those singing Sabbath bells heard only in village churches. In summer weather the shadows of many leaves fall upon the roof from two great oaks, like phantom wreaths of shade and sun. In winter winds their naked boughs lock arms above it as if they held it, like the love of God, in a firm embrace.

The inside is filled with a brown gloom from the unpainted walls and pews, which have darkened to a deeper, richer tone, very soft and kind.

On the first Sabbath in every month the communion table stands within the altar, a white cloth spread over the bread and the wine, and the two goblets. We still take the sacrament here from a common chalice, decently trusting the Lord to save us from each other's contagion. If there is anything else in this world so much like the memory of "His loving kindness, oh, how great," as an old church like this, with the people kneeling, saint and sinner side by side, about this altar on such a day, neither doubting nor judging one another for the moment, I have never seen it.

But, however we may dignify an altar, Nature or accident comes in and humanizes it. Directly after the war nails were scarce and the pulpit was made of boards pegged together.

One of the pegs fell out, doubtless jarred from its hole by Brother Myrick, who was a powerful preacher, with a prophet's beard and a Sinai countenance. He often pounded the Bible during his discourse to make it go down better with his congregation.

On a Sabbath late in October he was preaching from the text: "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life." The brethren listened drowsily; the elder women dozed, mulled in the wine of the word. Brother Myrick lifted his voice, endeavouring to hold their attention. "S-e-a-r-c-h the Scriptures, my brethren!" he shouted, waving his right arm in a fine gesture and bringing his fist down with a bang upon the open book.

Instantly everybody sat up; every neck craned; every head turned sidewise, one ear toward the pulpit; eyes rolled at the preacher, who had drawn back and flattened himself in petrified amazement against the wall behind him. A sound like closeted thunder issued from beneath the Bible. It filled the house—a sibilant, angry sound, as if the prophets had risen in wrath from First and Second Kings.

We never admit it; but, whether civilized or savage, we are always expecting the miraculous. And nobody really likes it. The angels only

know what fires of unwilling faith and terrified superstitions were kindled in the minds of that congregation as the noise increased.

Suddenly, while we expected the very heavens to fall, Brother Myrick clapped his hands to his head, leaped into the air, and cleared the pulpit at a bound. He was pursued by a swarm of bumblebees, which encompassed him about like a cloud of witnesses. They continued to boil in a furious, smoking mass of wings and stings from that peghole beneath the book board, where they had made their winter quarters.

We did not wait for the benediction.

Those first years when we had the pegged-board pulpit seem the best to me, in spite of the fact that we made it harder for one another than we do now.

I can remember when women did not wear their gold breastpins to divine services. I was a little saucer-faced girl, just beginning to study the catechism and learn how to gossip like a little squab Pharisee, when we had a scandal about the preacher's wife's bonnet. She was a bride and still wore her wedding clothes when she appeared in the church that first Sunday. Her hat was a bewitching little cocked-up thing, put on her head sidewise for the glory of love rather than the glory of God. Sitting close to my mother,

I divided my attention during the sermon between the vision of this beautiful hat and Mrs. Withers, who was also studying it with malevolent intensity.

Immediately after the services Mrs. Withers led the young wife aside. I followed at a little girl's convenient eavesdropping distance.

"That must come off!" said the old lady sternly, pointing at the flagrant bow raised like an iridescent hallelujah on the side of the hat. "Such vanities are strictly forbidden by the rules of our church!"

There was a flash of resentment in the bride's eye, a gesture of quick defiance. Then her countenance fell. Along with so many preachers' wives, she passed under the yoke of "Sisteren" tyrannies for her husband's sake.

"Very well," she answered faintly, her eyes swimming in tears, her lips pressed tight to keep back what she must not say.

My sympathies were all with her as she went meekly out of the church. At the same time I did not doubt that Mrs. Withers was right. It is only within the last few years that the rules in our Discipline have been modified enough to permit a woman to wear such a thing without perjuring herself.

But even then the leaven of liberty was working

in the vain and tender hearts of women. The next day my mother and two other sisters called upon the bride. They asked her for her bonnet. She yielded it, still terrified. It looked like a picked bird, for she had already removed the bow. In the evening they returned it to her, covered with the prettiest flowers in their bandboxes; and mother kissed her and told her not to worry about the dragon of righteousness in Sister Withers, who was really a good woman in her hard-fisted way.

This happened in the days when two or three brethren, who were spiritually minded, occasionally waited upon another brother whom they had managed to overtake in a fault and reproved him. Free will was a doctrine that gave us the old advantage over the Baptists, who believed in election, and the Presbyterians, who believed in predestination. We dared not practise it on one another.

Nevertheless, we had more accessions to the church "by profession of faith" than we do now. More penitents came to the altar for prayers, repented, believed, and were saved from everything but their other sins.

I say "other sins" because conversion only redeems a man from the transgressions he has already committed. It does not insure him against the other kind, which he is certain to develop, en-

couraged by his own righteousness. For every virtue you acquire, there are two or three attendant shortcomings. The effort to live as a citizen of heaven here is like straddling the grave and trying to exist in two worlds at once, without naturalization papers in either. It cannot be done—not all the time. So long as we are in the flesh, the scenes of the soul are laid there, with enough to keep everybody busy.

When we put both feet in the grave, and pass through it, they are laid beyond. I have yet to see the man or woman, lacking in this practical wisdom, who does not become a Pharisee or something not quite equal to a square deal in just the truth. We are obliged to judge one another, even if we are commanded to "Judge not." Dove-and-serpent wisdom consists in remembering that "with what judgment ye judge . . . it shall be measured to you again"; and go ahead with your judgments, prepared to take and profit by the consequences. And it's all very well to live in love and charity with your neighbour; but if she permits her chickens to scratch up your garden and sicks her dog on your cat, you cannot. The thing to do is to kill her chickens and your cat, and clear the decks so that you can. My idea is to do my best, no matter how bad it is, and never to bear malice. This is the spirit of the law. No one can live up

to the letter of it without damaging his soul or the other fellow's with too much meekness, which is incipient hypocrisy. I am always in a position to thank my Heavenly Father that I have good reasons for knowing I am no better than my neighbours.

What I am trying to say is that when you settle down in the Christian life; when the years take hold of your knees so that it is hard to rise from your prayers; when you are old and sad, and wise enough to know your own ever-besetting sins as others have known them all along—you cease to expect perfection in yourself or in others. You realize, with comfortable Christian fortitude, that, after all, perfection in this changing world is bound to be imperfection to-morrow.

This reminds me that some years ago the Holiness people got into our church and nearly ruined it before we could live them down. I had my share in that by convicting Mary Fisher.

She lived next door to me then. And her chickens lived in my garden. I admit that I had a wayward cat, which she claimed committed depredation in her kitchen. We were both in an unchristian frame of mind when the revival came on. We had a travelling evangelist that year to help with the meeting, not suspecting until he was in full swing that he preached "sanctification."

When things warmed up, half the church members began seeking this deeper work of grace. It was like Mary to get it first. She was a nice little woman, with a thin body and economical features. And she had a soul like a sparrow, which was always falling to the ground in order to make sure that the Lord numbered the very hairs of her head. She claimed the "second blessing" with hallelujahs of rejoicing; said the very roots of evil had been taken out of her.

I sat in my pew behind the choir and watched her work over Taggy Lipton, who wanted sanctification but was too honest to claim it.

After the meeting was over and we had settled down in our strictly human natures once more, I revolved a certain thing in my mind. I went to see Sister Massengale, whose only worldly amusement is to raise game chickens for her own table. I loaned her my cat and borrowed the fiercest-looking rooster she had.

The next morning I was awakened at daylight by the most awful racket in the garden. I ran to the window. There were four or five hens sitting on the fence, with their wings down, cackling as if they'd die if something didn't stop. Mary was there, too, not more than half dressed, with the hairpins she rolls her bangs in every night sticking up like porcupine quills. She was jumping up and

down, smacking her hands and screeching loud enough to bring the town marshal.

In the middle of the garden her old Plymouth Rock rooster faced the game as a fat clown would face a slim young knight-errant. They were not saying anything, those roosters; but the Middle Ages never saw a duel with swords conducted in a manner more ceremonious or with deadlier instinct. Their neck feathers were roached up like Elizabethan ruffs. Every time Mary's rooster dropped his wing to kick it with his claw, the game would flirt out his long leg and spur him somewhere. Once or twice they clinched, did their worst to each other's heads, drew off, took aim, and started again.

It did not last long. Before I had time to realize that I was promoting cockfighting across the street from the parsonage and church, the Plymouth Rock dropped beneath a well-aimed thrust. The game made a low cock-a-doodle-doo remark to the hens on the fence, stepped into the potato patch and helped himself to a bug, as if killing an adversary was merely an early morning incident.

At the same moment Mary caught sight of me at the window.

"I'll pay you for this, Mary Thompson; I will, if it's the last thing I ever do!" she screamed, pink with fury.

"Remember you are sanctified, Mary Fisher; and 'Vengeance is mine, . . . saith the Lord,'" I shouted back.

We stood measuring mortal minds for a moment; then Mary went into the house.

The next Sunday we sat side by side in the church. It was Communion Day. When those who were "in love and charity with their neighbours" were invited to come forward and partake of the sacrament, I made haste to accept the invitation, but Mary hung back.

These little incidents, so trivial, make up the family life of a church, and they have more effect upon it than the Conference assessments. How many times have I seen church members watch some brother on Communion Sunday to see whether he'd dare take the sacrament, having private knowledge of a difficulty he'd had with another brother; in fact, it requires courage to stay away, for everybody wants to know why you do. And they will find out. Fortunately the Lord is hospitable. I doubt that He objects when a bitter-hearted saint occasionally takes what's offered.

There is always somebody in the church who makes religion a kind of cross-stitch between piety and persecution. I have known a Christian woman to aggravate her husband about his soul in

a way that was little short of diabolical. Sally Parks told me this story herself.

"When I married Sam," she said, "he was not a Christian; but I never rested until he professed and joined the church. I didn't worry him or plead with him. I just set aside Friday of every week to fast and pray for my husband. I kept it up for ten years. During that time I had four babies and did most of my own work, except on Fridays. Then I went to my room and left him to manage the best way he could. He knew what I was doing and it used to make him mad at first; but after a time he got used to it At last he gave in and joined the church. But I tell you it was hard on me!"

It was harder on Sam. Everybody in town knew his wife was praying for him. He was a good man. You couldn't have told from his walk and conversation that he was dead in his trespasses and sins; but the consciousness of knowing that we knew what his wife did to him on Friday took the spirit out of him. He wore the expression of a sheep-killing dog. Finally he went to the pastor about it.

"Brother Wrenn," he said, "I wish you'd stop my wife from praying and fasting for me every Friday."

"Why, what do you mean?" demanded Wrenn, astonished.

"Maybe you don't know how it feels to have your wife desert you one day in the week and take the whole of it to backbite you to the Lord. It's unfaithful!" Sam whimpered.

"Well, why don't you repent and join the church then?" the preacher asked.

"I ain't wicked," he answered indignantly. "I'm a decent, honest man And I just can't stultify myself by standing up and admitting before all the folks that what she's been telling on me to the Lord for ten years is so. It's been going on for ten years, I tell you!" he shouted "I can't stand it much longer. I'm thinking of getting drunk!"

Sally never admits that part of it; but the story goes that Brother Wrenn called on her and advised her to change her Christian tactics.

Shortly afterward Sam joined the church. He's done very well in it ever since—not what I should call a fierce labourer in the vineyard, but a useful man when it comes to squeezing out the last quarter of the preacher's salary and raising funds to paint the parsonage.

As a church, we have grown in the love and knowledge of Christ by the grace of God; but we grow in numbers the best way we can, not so much by proselyting as by offering salvation on easier terms than some other denominations.

We get the second-blessing people because we believe in an emotional religion as the world believes in emotional music or poetry, or oratory or politics. We get the backsliders from other churches, because there is no satisfaction in belonging to one which predestinates you to damnation after you have fallen from grace and feel badly enough about it anyhow. We cherish backsliders, which is a credit to our doctrines and our patience, as it is proper to keep a sick man in a hospital instead of turning him out because he gets a backset now and then.

Doctor Edd is one of these infirmary souls, subject to almost fatal lapses in his efforts to be a Christian. He joined the Baptist Church when he came here, years ago, to practise medicine. He is a good doctor and soon had the best people in town as his patients. But, though he is not a drunkard, he drinks periodically. And when he does he puts his whole mind, body, and soul into his cups.

The Baptists turned him out during one of his protracted sprees. Then he reformed and joined the Presbyterians. They bore with him until he reflected upon the dignity of the church. It was his inebriate fancy when he went on a spree to imagine some one was desperately ill, and he would start at a gallop to save a life.

One day he rushed into the study where Doctor McAndrews, the Presbyterian minister, was preparing his next sermon and ordered him to bed. The old Scotchman protested that he was well and had no need of a physician.

"But you are not well, my dear sir. Don't I hear you preach every Sunday? Don't I know a sick preacher when I see him!" exclaimed Doctor Edd, swaying on his legs, but firm in the conviction that this was a matter of life and death. "Let me see your tongue!" he demanded.

The indignant minister was forced to comply. The doctor wrinkled his nose at it and said it confirmed his worst suspicions. He refused to leave the house until he saw the minister undressed and in bed, all of which was accomplished with angry opposition on one hand and threats of violence on the other.

For this unseemly conduct he was dismissed from the Presbyterian Church. But he had a horror of being a lost sheep. He wished to be among good people, even if he was not good. He was like a beseeching alien who has had the kingdom of heaven quarantined against him. At the beginning of our next revival he asked to join our church. He was contrite and he was hopeful. We received him.

He goes on an occasional spree, bringing us into

disrepute as a lax church. Then he recovers himself, with a cheerfulness and courage that are sublime. He remembers his sins no more forever. We have lost hope of his reformation long since, but he never does. He is the official publican in our church. He sits on the back bench looking tragically worn, like a good soul crucified in his own flesh. When he is not there we miss him. We are more sorrowful over his one transgression than the many committed by hardier Christians, which do not detain them from being present.

He has lost all his practice except among the poor and unrespectable. We do not know how he lives. But he is generous. He is so ready to serve that it is as if we had done him a favour when the pastor asks him to go ten miles to attend a sick woman who cannot be cured but who wants a doctor just to hearten her up. He is the one man among us who knows, next to God, who the poor are that keep their poverty concealed as if it were a disgrace. And he never betrays them. But he will come by very privately and take up a collection of ham bones out of my smokehouse, and wheedle me out of a dress I don't really want to part with, for one of his secret mendicants.

Sometimes I have thought maybe Doctor Edd will be one of those lasts here who shall be "first"

in the kingdom of heaven. But I cannot see him so. I always think of him seated somewhere in a darker place behind the shining hosts, troubled about his wings, hiding his crown, waiting to serve.

Dregs in the bottom of the cup is a figure of speech used to denote the unfit and the unlovely; but sugar settles to the bottom, too. And it matters not how much we stir this church with disputes and scratching piety, there remains the sweetness of two or three saints that is never dissolved in our bitterness. This is a good deal to say for them, because presently you will see that there are many bitter-herb souls and stinging-nettle Christians among us.

Sister Molly Brown is one of those sugar-cured in the Scriptures of love and patience.

She is a tall woman, with a long, homely face, high, red-knobbed cheek bones, small, faded brown eyes, and a beautiful mouth which neither years nor poverty seems to change. It is a very sweet double line of benevolence in an otherwise forbidding countenance. Her feet are wide feminine flapjacks, which she slaps down with violent energy when she walks. She is a widow and she keeps the only boarding-house in Berton. It is a kind of adult orphans' asylum for anybody who comes along, from the man "without a job" to Doctor Edd, who is the orphan Molly always has

with her. She bears with these people, the dyspepsia of the school teachers, the butter-eating extravagance of those who didn't pay their last month's bill. She slaves for them in a way that tries my patience but never her own. She defends them to the last ditch and does their laundry besides.

She never visits as other women do; never goes anywhere except to church, where she is to be seen every Sunday seated in one of the foremost pews, fast asleep, nodding unconscious amens to the preacher. Sometimes it is funny to watch her—the damaging-to-all-of-us parts of the sermon to which she wags assent. I reckon this nap she takes during Sabbath services, having dismissed her boarders and her cares, is the soundest sleep she gets.

She is always heels over head in debt at the stores, but her credit is wonderful. It is based, like faith, on "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Every merchant in this town will tell you she is a "good moral risk."

She keeps a bone barrel in her woodshed. On the morning of the day the Woman's Missionary Society meets she piles the bones on a wheelbarrow, takes them to the butcher and sells them for ten cents, with which she pays her dues to the

society. Sometimes I think Molly Brown's dimes ought to count for more than they do when the Mission Board of our church is making appropriations for just the travelling expenses of its officers.

If some one is ill or in trouble, or has fallen from grace, her domestic nature undergoes a swift and radical change. She leaves her laundry in the tub. She casts her boarders from her, neglecting them shamefully, and she goes out to comfort or to seek and to save that which is lost. When we see her kiting along on a winter morning, with a shawl pinned over her head and her hands wrapped in her apron for warmth, we know some one is in affliction, and that presently that one will have a cook, a housemaid, a nurse, and a spiritual adviser by her side.

You never can tell where poetry will break out in a community. One day Molly said this to me in answer to a question I should not have asked:

"I am not sure of my salvation, Sister Thompson. I ain't, to say, as faithful to the church as I ought to be. Sometimes I want to get out of it and do what I do just for the Lord."

I looked at her inquisitively.

"Seems as if I just divided with Him," she continued. "It's confusing. My life's slipping away

from me into a journey through things I don't know and can't see. I feel as if I'd walked a long, long way with my eyes holden, just touching folks as I passed, as the blind do. It seems strange, when I know everybody here and never go about much." She finished simply, never suspecting that she has been across country many a time to the strange kingdoms of God.

I do not question that Emily Peters is as good as Molly, but she's different. She has what I call a sheep-face sou . You can see it every time you look at her—a poor, dumb thing somewhere in her, which stares at you from her large, blue, beseeching eyes asking you, for the love of mercy, to spare her. She is not good; she knows her transgressions are many and her sins very grievous; but, oh, she is trying so hard, so hard to do right! And do I think the pastor can help her if she tells him everything? I always advise against that extreme course.

"You are a single woman, Emily, and you should be modest about your faults. Don't admit 'em to anybody," I say.

As a matter of fact, I doubt that she ever had the courage to commit a real, upstanding sin in her life; but she is forever doing something to herself, keeping fasts, giving tithes of all she has now and then. She reads a book of religious

meditations, one for every day in the year; and she would never take the one intended for Tuesday, February the eleventh, say, for Friday, February the fourteenth.

She is the same way about her health. She takes exercises with writhings most awful to see, developing secret muscles. If her head attracts her attention with an ache she goes about all winter with a black veil wrapped round it and with her little withered face sticking out. But most often it's her digestion. Then she will wear the whole hot summer a bandage round her, just to see if it won't help. But it never does. She can't eat green corn without being "upset," no matter what she does. This year she got an idea about her feet. One day I met her coming down the street, bent forward, elbows akimbo, walking with her toes turned in. She looked like a sheep escaped from the shambles with its legs tied.

"What on earth's the matter, Emily!" I exclaimed, distressed to see her in such a fix.

"It's bunions," she said, stopping, but careful to keep the ends of her shoes touching. "I've two awful corns on the bottoms of my feet and I've heard walking pigeon-toed will cure them."

That is Emily Peters, inside and out, Job's own sister in the flesh and a neurasthenic invalid in the spirit. But you cannot induce her to take a firm

stand in the church for anything, she is so afraid of making herself worse than she is. When we have a row in our missionary society she's a neutral. When the congregation is split, like the Red Sea, over whether we shall have an evangelist to help our preacher during a revival, or repent of our sins the best way we can under his familiar preaching, she is still a neutral. When I see her at such times, sitting three benches in the rear of the argument, I could spew her out of my mouth for being neither hot nor cold. But you will find her in your church, too.

Like all Gaul, every church is divided into three parts—the Christians, the hardened saints, and the choir. The Christians are the least conspicuous. The pastor never finds out who they are until he has been with us long enough to look about him. They never "lead in prayer," or testify of their victorious struggles in an experience meeting. They do what they are told to do and let it go at that. But this church wouldn't last twelve months if it were not for their dull peace among us. You may see them every Sabbath day occupying all the temperate zone behind the hardened saints and the choir, like a windbreak between them and Providence; middle-aged bald-headed men, middle-aged double-chinned women, who listen to the

sermon, try their best to remember the text, and never fall out with the preacher.

My experience is that most of the rows and schisms in this church start with the saints. I have seen many an Old Adam steward, like Tom Warren, sitting in the amen corner, with a horned soul—not satanic, but the ordinary spreading antlers of an aged steer, usually lowered to goad the preacher in the flanks or some other steward in the ribs.

For ten years three or four of our prominent members have conducted a feud with the ferocity of outlaws. Old man Warren fell out with Roger Peters about the line fence between their two farms. The Discipline of our church forbids a brother to go to law with another brother; so they occupied all their spare time in moving that fence back and forth until they hated each other like poison. Peters changed his seat from the right-hand side of the pulpit to the left, so as not to be near Warren.

This disturbance led to the investigation of line fences throughout the entire community, and it was found that more than half of them were "in dispute." Some of our members quit the church. But the epidemic spread to the Baptists. They had no church rules to hold them down; so the court dockets for two years were filled with cases

about line fences. When they were decided the men who lost quit the Baptists and came to us, with their bitterness sticking to them.

Preachers came and preachers went. They exhorted, prayed, pleaded in vain. They could not bring harmony between these brethren, contending like unarmed savages over their dividing lines. The women took up their husbands' quarrels. Mrs. Warren said she would not speak to Mrs. Peters—not if she "met her face to face." The young people and sinners looked on. The church began to lose its grip in the community. Sometimes for a whole year, if we had a very tactful pastor, there would be a lull, merely a truce. Tom Warren and Roger Peters would not vote together, even to reduce the pastor's salary. And it was a sight to see Warren go up one aisle and Peters up the other to take the morning "offering"; then stand so far apart with it before the altar that the blessing asked scarcely reached from one basket to the other.

Meantime the reflex of these disturbances was felt in the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies. We could not agree upon any way to raise funds as we had done before, with ice-cream festivals in summer and oyster suppers in winter. By way of adding to the general confusion some members of the Aid Society decided to have a rag

carpet woven for the parsonage parlour. They compounded their rags and old clothes for this purpose. When the weaving was done Mrs. Warren told the pastor's wife to send for the carpet, sew it together, and put it down. This was Mrs. Wrenn, who was expecting her second baby and was frail. Therefore, she did not feel equal to the labour of making the carpet.

Mrs. Warren said she had suspected Sister Wrenn of being too proud; now she knew she was, since she had her nose turned up at that carpet.

Sister Wrenn was rebellious. She had a little money of her own and showed her independence by refusing to call anybody brother or sister. I doubt that she was altogether satisfied with the situation. No preacher's wife is; but few of them dare say so.

"If I'd known John Wrenn was to be a preacher I'd have got a divorce before I married him," she said, laughing, one day.

And it was hard on her, accustomed to comforts and freedom, still wearing her wedding clothes after three years in the itineracy, and fighting to keep her babies off a rag carpet with all the germs in town woven into it.

Mrs. Warren was so angry she called a secret caucus of the Aid Society. I heard about it through Sally Parks and I sent word to Sister Wrenn to be sure to go.

We both went, but we were not expected. Charlotte Warren was speaking to half a dozen women when we went in.

"We've worked and slaved to make our parsonage comfortable," she was saying. "We have given and spent for it. We ran round this town for days collecting rags for that carpet. And what thanks do we get?" she fairly screamed. "Scorn, not gratitude, my sisters; that's what we get! A rag carpet is not good enough. That's the way we have been treated; and I move we dissolve this Aid Society!" she concluded, smacking the palm of one hand with her fist.

I glanced round me. There was Sally Parks, looking more than ever like a raw-boned angel with a grievance. Emily Peters was squenched up close in the corner next to the wall, as if she hoped nobody would see her or insist upon her voting. Taggy Lipton was crazy to help with the sensation; "but"—that doubting word was written in capital letters upon her face. The other women waited to see which way the cat would jump. Then I caught sight of Sister Wrenn not quite conquered, tears in her eyes, knowing she must not answer back for her husband's sake.

I do not know why the wife of a preacher always looks like a widow; but she does, careworn and forlorn. And her husband's congregation usually

treats her as if she were a widow—gives her things, and not the things she wants; loans her the parsonage, and makes her feel that it is a loan.

These thoughts passed through my mind quicker than a flash, the whole scene and the meaning of it.

"Do I hear a second to my motion?" demanded Mrs. Warren, as much as to say: "Somebody had better second it!"

"I second it," cheeped Sally.

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Sally!" I cried, getting up as fast as I could and going down the aisle to face Mrs. Warren.

"As for you, Charlotte," I began, shaking my finger in her face, "you who have never had a child and don't know what it is to sew carpets together in such a condition—you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You persecute every preacher's wife who comes to us. You wouldn't let the last one beat the rugs for fear she'd wear them out. You complained because her little girl stood up in one of the parlour chairs. You've been the thorn in the side of that parsonage. But you can't dissolve this Aid Society if there is a single Christian woman in this church. It's going on if I'm the only member! Now let us pray!" I said, in a sudden flank movement, wheeling and turning my back on Charlotte Warren, who was too astonished to get her breath before we were all on our knees.

"Oh, Lord," I began, determined to get my version of the affair before the throne of grace, "Thou knowest that we are poor and unprofitable servants in this church, seeking our own rather than Thy glory. Thou knowest how the stewards have become stumbling-blocks in the way of sinners with their vain strivings to grab and keep each other's land and line fences. And, O Lord, Thou knowest in particular Charlotte Warren—how from her youth up she has been overbearing, proud, contentious. Have mercy on her, our Father. Send her sorrows and tribulations to soften her hard heart. Bring her head low in the dust if need be. O Lord, open her blind eyes and her deaf ears and teach her the law of kindness in her tongue." I could hear sniffings on all sides as I went on: "And forgive the weakness and meanness of any woman here who was ready to follow in her footsteps. And, Lord, cause Thy tender mercies to shine on our pastor's wife; fill her mouth with good things. Be Thou her strength and portion. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

I rose from my knees; and I went out of the church followed by every woman in it.

"Sister Thompson, this is the first time I've ever been proud to be a preacher's wife!" said Sister Wrenn at the door.

"Well, it's a great honour, I can tell you, my

dear. And, remember, it won't hurt you to claim kin with the elect of your husband's congregation," I added with a twinkle in my eye. "Even Charlotte Warren, who is a proud tyrant, is a good woman. We are all doing the best we can—considering that the devil is such an active part of human nature."

I do not question that Christians are a greater source of anger and trouble to our Heavenly Father than His sinners, for He can forgive them their transgressions of which they repent; but it must be much more difficult to forgive the saints their perverse, hard-headed virtues. They become too confident. I doubt if any man or woman can live acceptably guided by his own mind, however moral or intelligent he may be. "By my spirit, saith the Lord"—means more than mind. If this were not the case Charlotte Warren would be a perfect Christian.

As it is, I suspect her of being a Pharisee straddling the fence of spiritual things. She lives up to the Ten Commandments like a menace in this town. She does not commit murder; she does not steal; she never covets her neighbour's maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, being too well satisfied with her own things; and she pays her tithes rigidly. But I have observed that tithers are severe in their judgments of those less strict

in their interpretations of the law. She has always been a scourge to our pastor's wife—keeping her finger on her, so to speak.

Being a virtuous woman, she is hard on those who must still achieve virtue.

Before I thought she had time to recover from the shock of that prayer I prayed for her in the Aid Society, we hitched horns again, because she charged Lorena Day with kidnapping Lizzie Bart's baby and had her arrested.

Lorena is a poor girl who went wrong here years ago and has been maid-of-all-work in Molly Brown's house ever since, trying to live down her shame—which no woman can do.

Lizzie was a poor, lost thing herself. She died when this baby was born. Lorena and Doctor Edd were with her, and she gave the child to Lorena.

Charlotte said the place for it was the Orphans' Home. She didn't approve of allowing a girl like Lorena to bring up a child; but Molly and I thought the little thing would give her something good to live for and be the only pleasure she'd ever get out of life. So we went before the judge and explained how Lorena came to have the baby. And he agreed to allow her to keep it, to Charlotte's unbounded indignation. But I never saw a happier woman than Lorena was as she walked

from that courtroom with a child that was to be hers wrapped up in her shawl and hugged close to her breast.

This is the difference between Charlotte Warren and me. She never stands before any bar of judgment. She's always on the other side, passing verdicts herself. But if you get down to the bottom I doubt that there is a penny's worth of salvation difference between us. For, if she is a Pharisee, I am an old militant woman in the church, ready to fight if that's the only way to keep the peace right. I never have been able to keep it or allow anybody else to keep theirs if I thought it was wrong. I've been a flaming sword in every row we have in this church, and we seem to grow in grace through one quarrel to another.

I have told Tom Warren many a time what I think of the fuss about the ten feet of disputed ground between him and Roger Peters. I call it their ten feet of damnation. I have let Roger know more than once what I thought of his taking the fence down and turning his cows in on Warren's oats. I have pulled the ears of our stewards in public places, when their backs were turned, because they were behind with the preacher's salary. I have stood up for the missionary collections in this church, and the educational funds, when I knew both were really going into brick

and mortar and pride and spite, instead of into missions and education. I have stood by something the preacher said that gave offense when I knew he was wrong and ought not to have said it.

Sometimes I get terribly worked up over just myself for fear I'll come in the class which in the Last Day will say: "Lord! Lord!"—and He will say: "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity; I never knew you."

What I want to know is how anybody can work at all in this world without working more or less iniquity. Molly Brown is the best Christian in this town, and she systematically keeps able-bodied men and women in idleness by feeding them whether they pay or not, when if she didn't they would go out and earn a living. If there ever was a sin, that's one; and I have told her so. Doctor Edd is the bad man of the town, and he does more good than the rest of us put together; and I've told him that, too, which may have encouraged him in his wickedness. It is all very confusing to an old woman with a good heart and a bad disposition.

You never hear of the same kind of disturbances between Social workers as we have among Christian workers. The reason is, they make a science of the uplift business and we make a religion of it. They treat the cause of the diseases of poverty

and vice. And we do what we can to relieve just the symptoms of those disorders by prayers and charities. One way is no more successful than the other. The Social workers get a few jobs every year for the unemployed, which they lose during the next strike. We win a few souls every year for the kingdom of heaven, who are bent and determined to backslide every chance they get. They do not settle the industrial problems and we do not win the world for Christ. I have sometimes thought if they stressed spiritual values more, and if we stressed material values more, we might join forces in a common cause, route the financiers and philanthropists, discipline the bishops and the saints, and accomplish enough to show we have lived and served in our day and generation.

You are now familiar with the congregation in this church. You can stand on this page, look through the door on Sunday morning, and see us all sitting inside, like good Christian souls—which we are in the main: Tom Warren in one amen corner, Roger Peters in the other, each surrounded by his sympathizers; Taggy Lipton, Charlotte Warren, Sally Parks, and the rest of the prominent church workers, occupying upper-pew seats; Molly Brown, dozing in front; Doctor

Edd on the publican bench, behind even the gay young sinners—and the preacher standing in the pulpit like a target for all. But there is a short bench occupied by two men and two women, with the organist seated midway between them, far down at the very front. It is not merely that they hold the strategic position in the house; they look like a foreign element in the congregation. The men have a sleeked-up air. The women are better dressed. Their hats cast aspersions on all the other hats in the house. They show even in the line of their backs, that, except one sings alto and the other sings soprano, they are farther apart than the east is from the west. I do not know how they manage to say so much without saying anything; but they do.

This is the choir. It is also the War Department of the church; the commissary that provisions scandals, and the arsenal of the musical temperament. An armed camp in the midst of a neutral country is not more dangerous to peace than a church choir is to brotherly love.

In the first place, you cannot have a good choir without getting somebody in it who sings tenor correctly, but lives by no other virtue. Sacred music never sanctifies the choir, though it may be a great help in a revival. It seems to draw certain people who seek publicity, or it may be that the

gift of song naturally makes them prominent. In any case the choir publishes them. If you want to have a man's or a woman's character thoroughly investigated to the last deed done in or out of the body, do not appoint a committee of investigation. Just ask them to join the choir. The whole church searches them then. And the way they search one another is appalling. Their jealousies are incredible.

The first trouble we had was with our first choir, when the preacher took the place of Evalina Lipton, Taggy's sister-in-law, who had always been next to the organist, and gave it to Miss Buford, who was a music teacher here, and asked her to train the choir. Evalina vowed she'd never sing again. But if you can sing you cannot bear not to sing. So at the end of a month she returned like a martyr to her place. But she had a way of closing her mouth in the middle of a note and looking round at the congregation, as much as to say: "Did you hear her flat that note! Nobody can sing soprano with a screech owl!" And she would keep her lips pressed together like a pale pair of waffle irons during the rest of the singing.

The next trouble we had was with Oscar Fain. He sang tenor like an angel and kept his marriage vows like a tomtit. When his escapades

passed the bounds even of wifely endurance, which is very great if your husband has the artistic temperament, our pastor undertook to form a new choir composed of exemplary Christians. The effect was beyond belief. They carried the tune as if it were a dead man—by the head and heels, with the middle sagging. Besides, many persons in the congregation who felt that they could sing better were indignant because they had not been chosen.

At last it was decided that we should abolish the choir and have congregational singing. But, as the best singers had been offended, only the elder people, with cracked voices, who could sing nothing but long-metre hymns, would do their duty. The whole church developed the musical temperament, though we never fell to the level of musical morals. Molly Brown and I just went on with our high treble as if nothing had happened. Sometimes ours were the only voices to be heard except the preacher's. As Molly sang like a wandering sheep the fuss we made was far from harmonious.

Things were in this shape when Brother Worthen came to us as pastor. The brethren were at loggerheads over their line fences. The Woman's Missionary Society was split as clean as if Satan had walked through it over whether we should or

should not give to the special fund asked by the Missionary Board. Charlotte Warren had made her unsuccessful effort to dissolve the Aid Society, and Molly Brown and I had torn the church music to shreds in what I shall always claim was a laudable effort to preserve it. When we took up the hymn Brother Worthen gave out before his first sermon, and did the best we could with it, he looked at us as if we had poisoned him.

It is written: "The Lord will provide." And if He doesn't see fit to provide, the devil is certain to do so.

About this time Lily Triggs came back to Berton. She was a Shanklin before she married Triggs, who was a New York man and rich as Crœsus, according to the news we had. This was all we knew about her until she came back that winter to visit her folks. We thought more of her for doing this, seeing she'd risen in the world.

She came to our church looking like a particularly innocent little girl, very small and slim, very pretty in her velvet dress and her rich gold-and-black fox furs. She had a red rose stuck under the brim of her velvet hat and a lot of little tails bunched on top of it. The rose matched her curls like poppies in the wheat, and the turquoise pendant she wore was the colour of her eyes. In this church, where nobody has a velvet

frock and no one can afford furs except Charlotte Warren, who sets them off like a lady buffalo, Lily was as refreshing and charming as a bouquet in a bare and dingy room.

Molly and I yielded her the hymn with thankful hearts when we heard her soar away with it in a clear-sky soprano voice.

Everybody was delighted; after services Brother Worthen told Lily she was a real godsend.

"I love to sing—especially hymns," she said prettily.

Later in the week he called on her at the Shanklins' and asked her to help him organize a choir. She was so pleased; and she was glad of the opportunity to serve.

Before another preaching day they had a regular love feast organizing the choir. Oscar Fain, Sam Parks, and Evalina Lipton, with Susie King at the organ, were all practising sacred music like cooing doves. Brother Worthen was thankful to find somebody "with tact," like Mrs. Triggs, to manage the thing.

We never had such a harmonious choir or such good singing. The whole congregation united for once on this, though afterward I recalled that Sister Worthen hung back and looked dim, preoccupied, as if she thought maybe she might have to have a tooth pulled day after to-morrow. But,

as the preacher's wife usually wears an expression of subconscious pain or anxiety, I paid no particular attention to her beyond saying as I went out:

"We certainly are to be congratulated upon getting Lily Triggs interested in the choir."

"She sings very well," she answered faintly.

I don't know how to tell what we went through with during the next three months. It was so subtly accomplished that it had every appearance of sweetness and light—which invariably rose to pæns of praise every Sunday in the choir. Lily was the high priestess in this secret situation.

After services the men stood about at a respectful distance regarding her with curious half-admiring, half-inquisitive attention. But if she had said "Coo sheepy!" the last one of them would have answered "Baa!" And by the same token the women began to hurry out of church the minute the benediction was pronounced, as if they didn't care to witness what followed. But Lily appeared to be sweetly unconscious of that.

At last people began to "talk." They didn't have anything to talk about—nothing definite. They merely cast their remarks to the wind, expecting to gather them before many days, like dangerous bread cast upon the waters.

"Lily Triggs is making quite a visit to the

Shanklins'," Taggy Lipton suggested one Sunday as we came out of the church together.

"Yes; but she doesn't come often," I answered.

"Still, it seems queer for a wife to stay away from her husband for three months. I've never been away from John three days since we were married."

I didn't say anything—merely pitied John in my heart. Taggy is a good woman, but the kind any man would need more than three days' rest from in the course of twenty-five years.

Meantime Lily's popularity increased. She was very cordial in her manner. She loved her neighbours even better than herself. Some of the Baptist deacons asked her to sing in their church. The vestrymen of the Presbyterian Church offered her a salary to come to them. She declined—said she felt that the Methodists needed her more and she was so fond of Brother Worthen. He was "such a dear man!"

One day Sally Parks called. She stayed so long I knew she had something to tell. I dropped the conversation as one might spread the net of silence for whatever might fall into it.

"Lily Triggs has left the Shanklins'," she announced presently.

"Gone home?" I asked.

"No; she's boarding at Molly Brown's."

"That's just like Molly!" I exclaimed.

"That's just what I said when I heard Lily had gone there," Sally agreed.

"Well, you oughtn't to have said it, Sally!" I put in quickly, pretending not to notice the look of astonished injustice with which she regarded me.

It is easier to see that a thing is wrong when you hear another person say it than when you've just said it yourself.

"They say she's not going back to her husband," she began again.

"Not going back! What do you mean?"

"She's divorced, and gets three thousand dollars a year alimony. That's what it means!"

"Merciful heavens! And she conducting our choir!" I groaned, never having even spoken to a divorced woman before in my life.

"It does seem strange," Sally agreed primly, "especially since there was so much evidence put in at the trial of 'corespondents' on both sides. What are corespondents in a divorce suit?"

"They are the vipers in the bosom of matrimony. That's what they are!" I replied.

"You don't say!" she gasped, not quite understanding what I meant.

"What will Brother Worthen do?" I said, sighing.

"Oh—'It's the duty of all Christian people to stand by Sister Triggs in her troubles.' That's

what he said when Sam told him, as he felt bound to do. It wouldn't look so bad if Sister Worthen had ever called on Lily; but she hasn't, and she doesn't speak to her at church," Sally added after a pause.

"Listen, Sally," I said, seeing what was hissing in her mind; "don't talk. Don't dot an 'i' or cross a 't' in this unfortunate affair. We've got enough to contend with now in our church."

"Oh, I'll not meddle. I am glad I had the sense not to be too free with her though. Evalina Lipton says she will quit the choir. And Mrs. Fain says she's stood enough. If Oscar doesn't resign from it, she'll resign from Oscar. As steward, Sam doesn't feel that he ought to be mixed up in such a scandal," she concluded, rising to go.

"Scandal, Sally! This isn't a scandal," I insisted anxiously.

"If ever I saw the naked face of a scandal in my life it's sitting in our choir every Sunday, Mary Thompson; and you know it!" she shot back at me from the door.

The next issue of the Berton *Banner* had this item in the Locals:

"Mrs. Lily Triggs has purchased the Carroll residence and will make her home here, to the delight of her many friends."

Well, she sent for her furniture and moved into the Carroll house, which is three blocks up the street from the Methodist Church and parsonage.

The next thing we heard was that Charlotte Warren said she'd stand by Lily to the last ditch. As a Christian woman she wouldn't see another woman persecuted who had done nothing but invoke the law to protect her against a brutal and unfaithful husband. She said if some of the wives in Berton followed Lily's example, and threw off the yoke of masculine oppression, she'd have more respect for them. The day had come when thinking women knew their rights and would have them, thanks to the example of Lily Triggs and other brave spirits. Charlotte was one of those women whose narrow minds broaden the wrong way.

Lily looked it all. She was just a sweet little student in fortitude, diligent in the Lord's service. When the choir didn't meet at her own house it met at the Warrens' every Friday night. Nobody resigned. To have done so would have meant giving up your standing in the best society. Brother Worthen stood by it like a godfather and the music in our church became sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.

In the spring Lily organized the Woman's

Equal Rights and Suffrage League. And Charlotte canvassed the town for members as she never had done for our Missionary Society. The only women who did not attend these meetings in Lily's beautiful home were the Shanklin girls, Sister Worthen, and me. Even Molly Brown went. She said Lily was a saint She told how Mrs. Triggs had gone to the grocery store and paid a debt for her that she had tried to pay for years. She said "that child" would take the clothes off her back to warm a beggar. And I don't doubt it. But in those days I never went to call on Sister Worthen that the telephone bell didn't ring. When she had answered it she'd come back into the parlour looking as white as a sheet and say:

"Mrs. Triggs wishes to speak to you about the hymns for next Sunday, Charles."

That would be the last we saw of Brother Worthen. You might have thought they composed the church music over the 'phone, they talked so much and so long about it.

Molly Brown didn't know enough about woman's rights or suffrage to believe in them, but she joined the league because she believed in Lily Triggs. You can fool a real saint every time. That's why I have strong, conscientious scruples about being one. I keep my worldly judgments clear to save the simple, like Molly.

We didn't have a revival that year—not a single convert during a series of meetings where the preaching was good and the music very fine. The women who usually pray and work for sinners and confess their own backslidings were so taken up with the league, and finding out about their rights and wrongs, that they wouldn't and couldn't become interested enough in salvation to do any good.

I am not opposed to suffrage for women. When I think of the years I have been a good citizen—never drunk; never disorderly; never breaking a single statute of Moses or the state, if I knew it; always paying my taxes; always obeying laws that I have had no share in making—I say when I consider these inequalities and injustices I get so mad I wish I had the chance to stuff a ballot box with the right kind of votes. And maybe I would do it if I did get the chance. No man or any woman can be trusted morally farther than they have gone and been tried out by experience and temptations.

I have heard much lately about the rights and wrongs of women. Lily sings on Sunday and lectures on them every Tuesday. In my day there was no such theme. A woman didn't cherish her rights or her wrongs. She had just one husband and a lot of children. Nobody looked in from the outside on marriage and wondered how such and

such a wife could bear to live with the kind of husband she had. Now they do. Every marriage is under critical inspection—not to say suspicion.

"I don't see how Maggy Fain can go on living with Oscar, shaming her the way he does with his unfaithfulness. If she had any respect for herself she'd leave him and get a divorce!" This from Sally Parks, who two months before had asked me what a corespondent in a divorce case was!

"A good wife, Sally, lives with such a husband, not because she is faithful to him but to herself; because she respects herself—not him," I answered coldly. "And nobody would have had to tell you that if you hadn't joined a feminist movement conducted by a divorced woman."

We exchanged these shots at one another over the gate late one afternoon. She went on about her affairs, somewhere down the street; but I stood there in the spring twilight, thinking of all the women I have known whose marriages were like this. I could see them in a long procession, moving silently like shadows before me, never complaining, never telling on him. They do escape every one. They live in the spirit. That which he keeps is merely the withered garment she leaves in his hands when she goes. This is why they look so dingy and bedraggled. They don't care how

their remains look. The world is full of these poor, little, invisible, outlawed spirits of women.

I endured these goings on in Berton as long as I could. At last one day Charlotte Warren and Lily Triggs came in to call on me.

Charlotte sat down with something like patience or condescension. The two moods are so similar that sometimes nobody can tell the difference. Lily posed herself like a spring bough in my best rocking-chair. I took a wide place on the sofa and looked at them over the top of my glasses.

"We have come to try to interest you in the feminist movement, Mary," said Charlotte.

"Which way is the movement headed, Charlotte?" I asked.

"Why, for the liberation of women; for the redressing of their wrongs; for better laws to protect them," Lily cut in, as if she was quoting from her own lecture.

"There are no people in the world for whom such stringent laws of protection are made as for women. They are so well protected that they've lost the sense of responsibility," I answered, shifting my gaze to Lily.

"Yes, but——" she began.

"A woman who never does anything," I interrupted; "who spends her husband's money; who lives unfaithful to the commonest duties she

owes him in the home; who does not even bear children for him—can get a divorce and alimony by proving his unfaithfulness in just one thing!"

"You are not opposed to suffrage, Mary. I've heard you say so," Charlotte hurried to put in by way of changing the end of the subject with which I was poking into Lily's ribs.

"No; but I'm opposed to corrupt suffrage. I'm chiefly for salvation and for the saving of sinners from the error of their ways, including women."

"But, dear Mrs. Thompson, the feminists believe as strongly as you do in the Christian religion," Lily said, bending forward prettily.

"'Ye shall know them by their fruits.' I don't like your fruits, Lily," I answered sternly.

"Really!" she gasped, drawing herself up and flushing very red.

"You believe in divorce, don't you?" I went on.

"Yes."

"It's one of the doctrines of your movement, as you call it?"

"Yes; but——"

"That's one of the fruits I'm talking about. It's bad for this town; for this country. If you believe in divorce you can't believe in a Scriptural marriage; and if you destroy that you've destroyed the very foundations of society. You——"

"Wait, Mary; we didn't come to discuss this subject," interposed Charlotte.

"No; but, now that you are here, I'm going to deliver my soul, Charlotte. I'll deliver a lecture, too, where I think it will do the most good," I said, rising and settling my glasses more firmly on my nose.

"You should remember, Lily," I went on, "that the Lord didn't approve of that divorced woman in the Bible who had so many husbands. He forgave her. That's the difference between righteous mercy and the boasted broad-mindedness of women like you, who have simply slithered through the virtues of your decent forebears. Sometimes I wonder how He'll find the means of forgiveness for such as you, who have put away one husband and are not ashamed to angle for them that belong to other women You who make a virtue of your iniquity! Oh, you can't fool me! I sit behind the choir. I know what I'm talking about!"—seeing her cast up her eyes in outraged innocence.

"Jacob did believe in God, though he was a mean man. David was sorry for his sins. And Job held to his integrity, though he had a bad disposition. And that poor Magdalene did want to go and sin no more They were all penitent, or faithful, or something that knit them to His mercies

as the weakness of a child binds it to a father's care. But for such as you, Lily Triggs, I do not know how He'll measure His judgments!"

I flopped back on the sofa and fanned myself, while Lily cried in her little lace handkerchief.

"Oh, such intolerance! Such bigotry!" she moaned.

"I don't see how you can call yourself a Christian woman, Mary Thompson!" cried Charlotte, rising in her wrath and making for the door.

"I am not this afternoon. I'm just a decent woman defending the statutes of virtue and honour, which are better protection for women than all the votes in this country," I fired back.

"I'll never sing in that choir again!" whimpered Lily.

"I hope you won't!" I called after her.

But she did. She said Brother Worthen had persuaded her that it was her duty.

Mr. Worthen was a good man, but a moral fool if I ever saw one. Before the end of the summer the very men and women who were most friendly with Lily Triggs were saying that the Conference would not send him another year; that he was a fine preacher but not the pastor we needed.

I was so worried over the feuds between the brethren, and the choir, and my own fault-finding spirit that I used to go round behind the church

sometimes and sit down among the graves to comfort myself.

We have buried our people back there for sixty years. Men who never could get on with each other in the church are lying side by side, like brothers in the same bed. I say it encourages me to know that the time will come when we, too, will finish our day's work and the strife with which we test each other's spirits, and lie down out there, like the lion and the lamb together. But we shall be dead, which in my opinion is the only safe way for lions and lambs to lie down together.

I'd sit there and watch the fallen autumn leaves come whirling and tipping over the tombs like little brown spirits of the dust blown in the wind. I thought of what a good man old Amos Tell was, though nobody could get on with him in the church. But his contrariness didn't count now in my thoughts. I only remembered how he bore the burdens of the church; how cross but generous he was with the poor; how he made the coffin for Molly Brown's husband and didn't charge her for it. Then I'd bend down and pull a few weeds from among the violets that grew round his monument, as I'd have dusted his coat for him after a long journey. And I would walk over and look at John Elrod's fine tomb—John, who didn't know whether he was willing to be a

fool for Christ's sake and who surpassed the wise in the simplicity of his faith.

I'd look down at Abbie Carmichal's grave as I passed—such a dingy little grave, with such a meek little monument over it. We used to think she was a great trial in the Missionary Society, always wanting to turn it into a spiritual meeting instead of attending to the business and collecting dues. She was hungry for the bread of life from morning till night. Now she was satisfied, with her dust lying so close to the roots of the great trees. People look better when you remember them after they are gone, and you do not need to contend with just their mortal frailties; and you wonder why you ever put so much stress on them anyhow.

I always feel as if I can bear with the living more patiently after I've spent an hour in this churchyard and see how far removed the dead are from their transgressions.

## CHAPTER III

AS I have been setting down the memories and experiences of nearly half a century in this little church our transgressions seem to outweigh our good deeds. This is due in part to errors in the accounts. Every man and every woman is better than he can live, exasperated as we all are by the goodness and the evil in our fellowmen. Still, it is safe to say that this church does not survive through the piety of its members. We may not commit the same sins that sinners commit, but we do accomplish much in the name of the Lord that helps the devil with his business. Otherwise he would not be so successful. For I have never seen a wicked man yet who did not hide behind the church and point the finger of scorn at its members as an excuse for his meanness. Such criticisms do not make us any more scrupulous in the practice of our Christian virtues. We go on plucking out one another's right eyes and cutting off one another's spiritual right hands because they offend us, without giving much attention to the beam in our own eye.

But this church does hold together. If it should be razed to the ground by some disaster, we would rebuild it at once, and kindle the fires of our faith upon its altar with the same prayers and feuds we have in it now. What is more to the point, if there was not a single church, nor a single professing Christian in this town, the very sinners would get together and build a house of worship. I have observed this, that the most corrupt people, the coldest rationalists, the atheists and agnostics, always elect to live in Christian communities. Our shortcomings and hypocrisies do not produce these unfortunate and deformed spirits, but they seek the light of our illusions, the foolishness of our faith, as an antidote for their own darkened wisdom. Nobody ever heard of a community composed only of these elements holding together, because such people cannot bear one another, not for half the life length of one little village church.

Any one sufficiently foolish and hidebound by his own limited faculties may prove to his satisfaction that there is no God, no life after this life, that man is himself only the diseased proud flesh from the dust from which he springs and to which he returns. But when he has thus squandered the illusions of faith there remains something homeless in him which he cannot domes-

ticate in rationalism or learning, or even in his natural affections. He cannot satisfy it with worldly fortunes, nor shelter it in his place of business, nor keep it at home with him. He needs a first-day-of-the-week refuge for this thing, whatever it is, though it may be dormant the remaining six days under the pressure of strictly carnal circumstances.

This is why bad men build churches that they never attend. The thing which they will not call the soul takes a mean, vicarious satisfaction in knowing that it has a refuge. This is why they give to the poor whom they despise. It is a kind of sick charity which the thing demands of them. It all comes from a sneaking way they have of stealing from their worldliness to pay poor old Peter, who is not deceived, and knows better than they do that they have not given that lot for a church, nor these alms for the poor, merely for the sake of policy. Deep in the heart of every rationalist and rascal who contributes to the support of Christianity is the lying desire for his own personal absolution. If peradventure it should turn out that, after all, God is—well, there's that church he built, and all those widows and orphans he fed and visited in their affliction.

We had a man here like that once. First he was a saloonkeeper. He made a fortune selling

whiskey directly after the war, when Berton was a crossroads groggery. When the local-option law closed his place he bought up all the land upon which the town now stands, and made money selling it off to the settlers. He donated to the various denominations the lots upon which all our churches were built. On the strength of that he became a prominent citizen and was elected the first mayor of Berton. But he always claimed, with a kind of bull-charging heartiness, that he did these things for the good of the town. He was no coward looking to an impossible Providence for what he could do for himself. He was a man—no hypocrisy about religion for him, and so forth, and so on. But when he lost the use of both legs with creeping paralysis, he would sit in his wheel-chair and tell off on his fingers how much he'd given to the churches and to charity. He'd whimper, and say he'd done more for the cause of righteousness than any Christian in the place. Then he'd look up like a dog asking for the crumbs from his master's table, beseechingly at the preacher. Methodist pastors are usually the ones who catch these old lame ducks of the devil, and Brother Wrenn, who was stationed here then, used to comfort him the best way he could at the expense of the Scriptures. We've produced our share of these short-circuit souls,

but I never knew one yet who didn't want to make at the end a kind of financial settlement of his righteousness with the Lord.

This same sense of homelessness and the desire for what I call spiritual domesticity is also the reason why two or three Presbyterians will get together in a town and build a church which they cannot afford. However able we may be to escape damnation in the open, we are all doctrinally scorched sons of the Gospel in our secret thoughts. So a Presbyterian does not find, say, in the Methodist Church, comfortable quarters for his predestination notions of Almighty God. He cannot feel at home among us who slide up and down through eternity upon the free-will cable of our faith. Our ways are not his ways. He must stand when he prays, while we kneel. He wants to take holy communion sitting up instead of kneeling before an altar to get it. He will and must rear back coldly unsympathetic when some young shouting itinerant recommends a too-easy, slithering means of grace.

Souls have family ties not less strong than the ties of blood. Baptists will not believe as comfortably as we do in their Heavenly Father. They must have a church of their own, with a baptistry under the pulpit to make sure of their election to eternal life. And while Methodists

are cheerful guests, able to pick up a spiritual living from the Gospel preached in any church, they are really the most clannish of all denominations. I reckon it is because our creed fits us better than any other, just as our clothes fit us better than those made for other people.

But the point I started out to make is this, that our church here, and every church, holds together because of the faith we have in God, rather than in doctrines, or in each other, or even in the preacher. We are different from other animals in that we are self-conscious, which is always a nervous, doubtful sensation. We cannot make sure of ourselves, nor of our other selves, the men and women about us. But we must be certain of something, built as we all are upon the sands; so we look to God.

The trouble is, we never can leave the Lord to His own nature. We reduce Him to ours and pray to Him in the terms of our own perversities and short-sightedness. We believe in an eternal, almighty, omnipotent, and merciful Creator. But what mortal man can define these attributes? We believe in heaven as a blessed estate, but how many times do we thank our Father that He still permits us to live in this present world, only blessed in the high places, filled with snares and tribulations? The best answer I ever heard to that was

given by old Doctor Branan, who died here many years ago.

He was a local preacher, very tall and thin, very old, with a straggling white beard and the eyes of a child. For years he went about this town like an elder angel with his wings folded inside, dragging his hind legs, so to speak, because he was too feeble to straighten his knees or lift his heels from the ground when he walked. He had outgrown the world in which he lived. He was so simply good that I reckon the devil despised him and had long since given up trying to tempt him. He had so little darkness of the mortal mind left in him that some people thought he was foolish. This is what most of us would think about a man so pure in heart he could neither see nor suspect us of our meanness. The old doctor was such a thirty-third degree saint as that. They say he was a powerful and scarifying preacher in his day. He was chiefly instrumental in closing the barrooms in Berton. Then he had himself elected justice of the peace, and he dispensed peace with an iron hand, becoming a terror to all evildoers. He put the lid on the town, then sat upon it with the code of Georgia in one hand and the Bible in the other, always opened somewhere in the Old Testament.

It happened so gradually that he never knew

when the town slipped from under him and went on about its sins and business. By this time his eyes were holden to earthly things, and he began to shine alike upon the just and the unjust. He automatically closed the "blind tiger," which Melton kept in the back of his livery stable, by hanging out there because he liked Melton, who was a very bad man in the opinion of everybody else. He held strict views about keeping the Sabbath. But toward the end he forget the names of popular transgressions, and he might be seen any Sunday afternoon seated beneath an old June-apple tree, watching a crowd of boys play baseball in his cow pasture. When some youngster started upon a home run with the odds against him, the old saint would fling his cane high in the air, and root like a cracked violin to encourage the race. Nobody in this town was mean enough to tell him that he was encouraging baseball on Sunday.

Finally one spring he fell ill. He simply lay down at the doors of death and stayed there. Every morning we heard that the doctor could not last through the day. But he lasted. The physicians said he had a fine constitution, but that it was only a question of time, there was no hope for him. Brother Wrenn began quietly to gather material for the funeral sermon. He found out when the doctor was born, how long he served as

chaplain of the Confederate Army, picked up stories here and there of his courage upon the battlefields of Virginia, went through the records of Berton to show what a brave citizen he had been in the lawless days of the Reconstruction period, collected anecdotes of his ministry and of his loving kindness in his old age. I reckon everybody in the town helped prepare Doctor Branan's funeral sermon. We were so taken up with it that we forgot to keep hourly tab upon the doctor himself. Then I met Doctor Edd one day coming from the doctor's house.

"Do you think the end is near?" I asked.

"Well, not so near as it was yesterday, and a good deal farther off than it was last week," he answered, looking at me drolly.

"Is he really better?" I asked, astonished.

"He's quit taking nourishment through a quill, wants it in a spoon, slept like a top last night, pulse stronger, respiration much better," he said, almost embarrassed.

"But I thought all the doctors agreed that he couldn't live!" I exclaimed, feeling somehow that we had been put in the wrong cribbing our memories to help Brother Wrenn with the funeral sermon.

"By rights he should have died a week since, Mrs. Thompson, but the old fellow got a hunch

somehow, made up his mind, without any knowledge of his fatal symptoms, to live, and he's fixing to pull through."

He did, too. He took his time about it, seeming to get well one leg at a time. Finally he crawled out of bed with a kind of pinched-up, glorified look about his face, as if he'd only taken advantage of being confined in the house to brighten his expression.

On the last Sunday in June he appeared at the morning service, walking a trifle steadier than usual, and took his accustomed seat in the amen corner. Now, it has been the custom in this church since the beginning for any person who wished to repent of something, or who for any reason desired the "prayers of all Christian people," to go and kneel at the altar during the singing of the last hymn. Very few of us ever avail ourselves of this privilege, preferring rather to seek forgiveness in our closet, so to speak, behind the back of our own pew, and thus avoid speculation on the part of our brethren as to what is the matter. But now and then some one does expose himself to the spiritual searchlight of the church by going forward in this manner. Whereupon the pastor always mentions "our dear brother" in the closing prayer, commending him to the tender mercies of heaven—but very carefully, in loose-

fitting terms, lest the petition should give some intimation of the real trouble, which we always suspect according to what we know of the victim who has risked the experiment.

What was our amazement on this Sabbath when we saw Doctor Branan arise with infinite effort, totter forward, and kneel at the altar! Brother Wrenn prayed a very feeling and eloquent prayer for him, in which many of us recognized material designated for the funeral sermon. We were confused. We could think of no reason why Doctor Branan should desire the prayers of all Christian people. If there was one without sin among us, it was this saintly man.

I was no less mystified than the others, but with this difference—I do not enjoy, as some do, merely the sensation of not knowing what I want to know. I can endure sickness, sorrow, affliction, and even death with decent courage, I hope, but I cannot endure my own curiosity. It consumes me like a fire. I can't sleep, and I cannot even remain awake with comfort; so I humour myself in this, as we humour a good child now and then with candy.

The next day I went to call on Doctor Branan, who lived with his widowed daughter. He was glad to see me. Yes, he was glad to be well again, he told me. And he was glad to be at church yesterday. And he was glad so many other people

were out, too. He was glad to have lived all his life in a Christian community. Then he looked through the window at the pleasant green and blooming world, and said he thought this would be a good crop year, of which he was very glad.

I agreed with him and endured as much of his gladness as I could, doing my best all the time to draw him in a certain direction. Finally I lost patience, seeing that he was determined to rejoice straight ahead as long as I would listen.

"Doctor," I began abruptly, "I want to ask you a question."

"What is it?" he asked, looking round at me in mild sweetness.

"You know people in our church who desire prayers for their sins, or the sins of any one near and dear to them, sometimes go to the altar at the close of the service."

"Yes," he answered, smiling.

"But, yesterday, why did you go? What could you have done to need so public a confession——"

"I didn't go for that, my daughter," he answered quickly.

"For what, then?" I insisted.

"You see I have been sick—so near to death that almost I saw the gates of one pearl. I was in great danger of the angels, you understand."

I did not understand, but I nodded my head.

"Well, when I felt, rather than saw, my family gathered round the bed, I kept my eyes closed for fear I should see—you know—beyond the things of time and sense. And I made a vow to God that if He would let me live I'd make a public thanksgiving at the altar for His mercies."

"But, Doctor, why did you want to live, you who have lived so well and who must be so sure of eternal life?" I exclaimed.

"That's it, my daughter!" he exclaimed, reaching out a tremulous hand in strange opposition. "This life to which I am so long accustomed is comfortably narrow. I am old and tired. I shrink from the heights and depths of eternal life. It appals me. I have always preached it and prayed for it. But when I stood upon the threshold of it I couldn't bear it, leaving all the familiar things—the grass, the kind green leaves, the sparrows in my hedge, that gate out there through which I have come and gone for so many years, this house so near and kin to me that I can find my way through it on the darkest night, the children on these streets, the men and women I have known so long. At my time of life I could not yield the companionship of so much that I know for the great and terrible things unknown to me in their awful splendour."

He was silent a moment, and then went on more

to himself than to me: "Every man must believe in immortality or perish. But every man who loves life must fear it, if he thinks what it means. I reckon I'll get used to it when I must, but not until then." He looked at me, smiling whimsically.

He died before the end of that summer. And I have no doubt he entered upon his duties of a citizen of Eternity with the same sweetness and courage that distinguished him here.

I never worry over what I'll do or how I shall feel in the next world. It is written that the Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. If He is so mindful of a sheep He will surely know how to take care of an old woman who has just lost her body and her mortal bearings. However, we never have a death in this town that the bereaved ones do not begin to question the providence of God to find out why He took this particular son or husband or father. And they never do find out. I do not admire Job. He must have been the Thomas Carlyle of the Old Testament, with remarkable literary gifts, but so cantankerous and mean that I've always wondered what his boasted integrity could have been. But he did know how to behave with dignity when his sons and daughters perished. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." That is as good a way as any of disposing of the

whole matter, though it places more responsibility upon Him than the facts warrant sometimes when the deceased has outraged every law of health, as the dead usually do before they die.

And after the bereaved family pass through this first acute stage of grief, when all their neighbours and friends have persecuted them into a state of resignation with arguments about why it was really best for the departed one to go just as he did go, they begin their spiritual convalescence by raising the second question: "Shall we know each other there?" "Will my mother recognize me in paradise?"

Maybe the mother in question was a high-tempered old lady who had nagged her children as long as she lived and never gave them a peaceful moment in her presence. But that makes no difference. They are worried for fear when they come through the big gates at sundown they will not hear her shrill voice complaining: "Johnny, where have you been all this time, with the chores not done, and me having to bring in the wood and kindle the fire in the stove?" Or, "Come here this minute, and let me feel of your head. I believe you've been in that swimming hole again, catching your death of cold! If your hair's wet I'll punish you as sure as I live!" And so on, and so forth.

Our pastor may preach the most beautiful funeral sermon over this departed mother. He may draw the finest pictures of eternal life and paint her with a crown upon her poor old head and a harp in her poor old hands. But in his heart of hearts her son John finds no comfort in these glories, because nobody can promise him that she will know him, or that he will know her in the kingdom of heaven. I say these questions do not trouble me any more than the question whether the angels have their wings put on behind or in front. But you cannot exercise your spiritual imagination by discussing them, without risking the charge of heresy by somebody who has a penguin soul and no imagination at all.

One cold day in January I was out collecting dues for our missionary society. We had not been doing very well since I prayed for Charlotte Warren at the meeting of the Parsonage Aid Society. Some of the women took up for her, and went so far as to say that I called on the Lord to deal harshly by her, which is the truth. But if ever a woman needed a spiritual chastisement that woman was Charlotte. I knew I had done right and had prayed for her properly, but many a time I have found that performing the harsher duties of my Christian life hurts my conscience quite as much as any sin I dare commit.

This, I believe, is the reason so many church members avoid their sterner obligations to each other. It is much safer in this present world to leave a brother to backslide than to tell him to his face that he is becoming a liar, a thief, and a drunkard. And it's five times more prudent to be silent when your sister in the church is developing the character of a termagant saint, than to tell the truth and let the people as well as the Lord know what she is doing.

So I was very low in my mind that day as I went from house to house, collecting ten cents here and a quarter there, trying to smoothe the rumpled feathers of the opposition and to persuade everybody to come to the next meeting of the society. Maybe my depression was partly due to a bad cold.

When I reached Sally Parks' gate I saw her bobbing up and down in her flower pit, which is on the sunny side of the yard. I have seen many a woman who looked indigenous among blooming plants; but Sally is not one of them. She always gives the impression of an outraged mother when she is in that pit. She snatches off the dead leaves of her geraniums as if they ought to know better than to wear stockings with holes in them. She thrusts her fingers in the soil as if she suspected her snapdragons of going to bed the night before

with cold feet. She turns up the leaves of her rose cuttings, narrows her eyes, primps her mouth, and searches for mildew as if she was looking at little Jimmy's ears to make sure they were clean. Altogether, she is very busy and very fault-finding with them, but she can stick the stem of any flower in the ground with so much authority that the thing will not dare to die, but grows and blooms dutifully as a scholar learning to read.

On this particular morning she appeared to be in a strangely placid mood when I greeted her from the door of the pit.

"Good morning, Sally! Nothing hurt by the frost, I hope. Last night was very cold," I said.

"Oh, good morning, Sister Thompson," she exclaimed cheerfully, facing about from something she was doing.

"No, they are all right. I was just counting the buds on this Cape jasmine bush. They'll be in bloom by the time we need them. There are nine—enough to make a cross, I think."

"A cross! What for?" I exclaimed, coming down into the pit to get a nearer view of the big green bush which she keeps in a tub.

"Haven't you heard? Taggy Lipton's mother is very low. They don't think she'll live but a day or two longer. I always set my Cape jasmine

in here during the winter to make sure of having proper flowers for funerals, you know."

I didn't say anything, merely sat down weakly upon the bottom step with the cold chills running up and down my back. Every year in March I come down with a spell of grippe which always threatens to go into pneumonia. I could see Sally running in to find out how bad off I was, then hurrying home to see if she had enough gardenias to make a cross for my casket in case the worst happened. How many times, I wondered, had she done this!

"Do you remember the winter Lula Jackson died?" she went on, not noticing the state I was in. "There wasn't a single blossom in Berton. The girls in her Sunday-school class got together to do something about it. They took all the artificial flowers off their summer hats, made anchors and crosses of them with cedar foundations. I'll never forget how the casket looked. We all recognized the wreath of wild roses on it that Fedora Branan wore on her white leghorn for two seasons. We knew the design of lilacs came off of Emily Peters' straw. We'd seen the forget-me-nots many times on the little Peters girl's bonnet. Well, I made up my mind it should never happen again, that I'd grow natural flowers for the dead if it took half my time to attend to

'em. And I've done it. I've sent a wreath or cross of these Cape jasmines to every funeral we've had here since, even if it was a cold-water Baptist that was to be laid out."

It's wrong to judge people. Every time you do it and hand in your verdict, they do something that reverses your decision. Suddenly I thought differently about Sally. Seeing her perched up beside her funeral flower bush, I thought how kind she'd been to think of such a thing. I could see her drifting into paradise very old and thin, her hair skinned back the way she wears it, her brow wrinkled above her popped eyes, her mouth primped from the long struggle she's had working and digging to make ends meet and flowers grow, but wearing over her dingy mourning—for she's always in black for somebody—all the garlands and wreaths she's woven these many years for the other dead, perfuming the whole place with her gardenia deeds of charity. I could see the shining hosts take a long breath of that sweetness. Then they'll look round, see just Sally Parks, very much confused about which way to go, where to take off her things, and with her red elbows sticking out through the blossoms! I do not say that they will recognize her as Sally, she having been raised a spiritual body, though I've sometimes wondered what manner of incorruption the Lord

prepares for a homely old turkey-legged woman like her. But they will know what Sally will not understand herself, that she's clothed in the kindness of her own deeds.

Now if I'd stopped with that vision of her redeemed in all her jasmine glory, if I'd collected her dues then and there for the missionary society and gone on about my business, as I should have done, that would have saved me much trouble and this church a scandal connected with one of its oldest members. But when my mind starts outward and upward it's hard for me to get it down without some kind of spiritual accident.

"Did you ever think of this, Sally," I said suddenly, "that if we are immortal we always have been immortal?"

"Don't tell me you believe in the transmigration of souls, Mary Thompson!" she cried, staring at me in horror.

"I don't, and don't you ever say I do!" I retorted indignantly.

"Well, then, what do you think you were before you became what you are?" she asked suspiciously.

I knew what was in her mind. Old Dan Mitchell, who came from no one knew where, had dropped into Berton and set up a shoe shop. Then he organized what he called the Society for Psychic Research, and the people who belonged

to it didn't belong to any church. But they held meetings and professed to receive communications from departed spirits.

"I've had my doubts about a good many things, Sally," I answered, determined to avoid the snare of spiritualism, "but my faith has never wavered about this for a moment. I know that I've always been just myself. I know I've never been a cat or a bessie-bug or a protoplasm. I started out a woman, with the earlier stars. I feel that since the beginning I've travelled as steady as any of them toward this place, this church, and all the duties that make up the rotary motions and diurnal existence of a Christian woman."

She stared at me as if she thought I was talking in my sleep.

"Sometimes," I went on, merely cavorting in my spirit, "I almost remember playing with Eve's little girls, I can see 'em so plain in their vegetable pinafores and petticoats, kicking up the dust. Maybe I was standing a long way off in the sand with a veil over my face, watching for Isaac when he went to meet Rebekah at the well. My folks may have wandered off and married with foreigners, and for all I know I may have been the grandmother of the Sphinx or one of the Cleopatra girls——"

"A Christian woman," interrupted Sally fiercely,

"saying such things, thinking herself in and out of heathen bodies—and at your age, Mary!"

"It's my age that makes me do it," I insisted whimsically. "Sometimes I feel as if I'd been every woman, good and bad. You ought to be thankful I don't recall being one of those shameless jades in the church choir at Corinth in Paul's day. I've lived a long time. I've been so far."

"When did you go? I never heard of your travels before!" she sniffed.

"How many times have you read your Bible through, Sally?"

"Every three years since I joined the church. Why?"

"Didn't you ever see the tents of Abraham in the land of Uz?"

"No, I never did! And I'll have you know I don't feel kin to Cleopatra, nor——"

"Can't you remember the day Job's sons and daughters were drinking and feasting when the house caught fire and burned them up, what a sight that was—the flames leaping between the earth and sky, the flocks flying, the shepherds shouting, the messengers running to tell Job what had happened, and——"

"Look here, Mary——"

"And did you never feel that you were one of the guests at the wedding in Galilee when Jesus came

in unexpectedly and changed the water to wine, and how amazed we all were?"

"I don't know what you are talking about. It sounds flighty and dangerous—Cleopatra and all that! I hope I'm a Christian woman. I believe as much as you do in eternal life after death, but nobody can accuse me to my face of being the missing link in my own immortality without my resenting it!"

I had to laugh at the idea of her being her own missing link. But I paid dearly for that trip through the holy land of my imagination, especially the part which took me through Egypt.

Sally reported over Berton that Mary Thompson believed in the transmigration of souls, and laid claims to being one of the Cleopatra girls, without telling which one. I paid no attention, being an old woman who had never acted in a manner to suggest any strong trait of the Cleopatra family. But when my own neighbours began to stare at me in church, as if I were a doubtful stranger they'd entertained unawares, something in me began to rise which had no resemblance to piety.

One day old Dan Mitchell passed me on the street, and he bowed to me familiarly with a kind of high sign in his eye, as if we held views in common, though I despised him and all his works.

But Sally, who was in and out of my house nearly as often as the cat, discontinued her visits. No matter where I caught sight of her, she was always going in the opposite direction.

At the next meeting of the Woman's Missionary Society I had a whole bench to myself, until Molly Brown came in and sat beside me, which showed how bad off I was, because Molly always cleaves closest to those in affliction. Then Charlotte Warren, who was president, called the meeting to order. She said she would take this occasion to do her duty, however painful it might be. She explained that since we were to elect officers for the coming year, she felt obliged to suggest some one else be appointed treasurer, that it was injurious to the cause for a person holding heathen views concerning immortality to have an office in the society.

Sally Parks pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and wept. Emily Peters tried to look as if she had never heard of any views about immortality. Taggy Lipton stared imploringly at me, as much as to say she was willing to defend me to the last ditch if I'd take back what I'd said about being one of the Cleopatra girls. The other women glanced, first at me, then at Charlotte, frankly curious.

I acted the part of a face-slapped Christian for

once in my life. But when Charlotte called for the treasurer's report I read it—in full. After showing how few had paid their dues, I mentioned by name those who had not paid. I told how often in all weathers I had made a house-to-house canvass, trying to collect what they owed. I gave the excuses they had given me. Sally Parks was behind six months with the regular assessment. Charlotte had paid nothing on the "special," which is always about four times as much as the regular dues. In all, the various members owed sixty-eight dollars.

"These debts are allowed in law," I said, closing the book and giving them a long look over the top of my spectacles. "I must and will balance my books as treasurer before the election of officers at the next meeting of this society. I shall, therefore, turn over these accounts to an attorney for collection at once."

Then I sat down and patted my foot. It is a question in my mind whether anybody can be treasurer of a woman's missionary society and retain all her Christian virtues. If, however, you lose some of them in the scrimmage, you may always regain them by proper repentance. But once you submit to the tyranny of an overbearing woman like Charlotte Warren, even your virtues profit you nothing in peace.

The last one of them paid their dues the following day. Charlotte sent a naked check for what she owed without a word of comment. But I was not at the end of my troubles. By this time the rumour of my heathen views had reached the pastor's ears. This was Brother Hale, an old man who preached against something all the time. If it was not theatres and dancing, it was the Baptist doctrine of election, or the Presbyterian's shorter catechism.

On this Sunday morning he read a good deal from Ezekiel about familiar spirits and divination, which showed how strongly Ezekiel felt about the competition between jugglers and prophets in his day. Then Brother Hale preached on this: "Beware of sorcerers." He was furious with sorcerers, as if there was one present who was crowding him and all Christian people out of their spiritual rights. He quoted from the Acts of the Apostles, to prove how the practice of sorcery leads to strangely evil incantations of the soul and destroys the moral sense.

"Bretheren, bretheren!" he shouted, "this is no capsule doctrine I'm giving you! It's the naked quinine! If there be any among us given over to this iniquity, we must purge this church of them or bring down upon us the condemnation of a righteous God."

He might have been warning us against the Society for Psychic Research, but my own mouth tasted bitter and my feelings were outraged. If I had stood up in an experience meeting and confessed to half a dozen sins, nothing would have been said about that. Nobody would have thought less of me. We all told things of ourselves at such times that should have debarred us from society, but that only knit us closer together in the bonds of sympathy. But I was being held up to condemnation before the church because I'd made use of a poetic figure of speech.

I was conscious of covert, accusing glances from various sources in the congregation as Brother Hale went on. Once Lily Triggs flirted round and looked me squarely in the face, as much as to say, "Thou art the woman!" Then she flirted back and gave her attention with a pious air to the preacher. If she had spoken aloud she could not have made clearer what was in her mind—namely, that she might have her faults, she did not pretend as some people whom she knew did, but no one could accuse her of having a vagabond soul mixed up in heathen scandals!

If any one thinks this account of my experience is exaggerated, let them recall the things for which men and women have been burned at the stake, not because they were bad but because of a difference

of opinion about a doctrine or a creed. I have known a preacher, a good man who believed firmly in the cardinal doctrines of the Methodist Church, to be tried for heresy because he made frank use of the term evolution in his sermons. I do not like that word myself. It looks low down in front and high up behind, as if it had its nose in the dirt and its heels in the air. Still, only bigotry could have driven a Christian minister out of the church who used it. A few years ago a presiding elder in our Annual Conference brought charges against a preacher and had him "located," because the unfortunate man stubbed his spiritual toe against the doctrine of infant baptism, and balked at performing this rite for the babies born in his circuit. I'm a firm believer in infant baptism. It never hurts the child, and it sometimes helps the parents, who really take the vows, to do better by their baby. But I said then, and I still believe, it was a mean, unchristian act to turn that preacher out of the itinerancy because he didn't feel called to baptize babies. There are as many martyrs now in the churches as there ever were. The only difference is, we do not put them out of their pain so quickly by burning them.

However, I lack the elements of martyrdom. Such meekness as I have is of a militant character. I was sitting before the fire that after-

noon, too angry to read my Bible, which is a thing I do every Sunday afternoon, when there was a knock at the door and Brother Hale walked in.

We were both on our guard. He said he thought it was going to snow. I said I didn't care if it did. What he meant was: "This is a very sad day for us all, Sister Thompson." What I meant was: "You can't put off the bad weather of your spirit on me, Brother Hale. I've enough weather of my own!"

He sighed. He warmed first one foot, then the other. He worked his mouth in his beard and groaned. I just waited with my hands folded and my eyes fixed coldly upon him.

"Sister Thompson," he began at last in a sepulchral voice, "I have always regarded you as a Christian woman——"

"I am, up to a certain point, Brother Hale," I answered quickly; "after that I'm just a natural woman."

"Ah, yes. It's hard to overcome the Old Adam——"

"I can manage any Old Adam I know. It's the evil of the Eves in this situation that troubles me," I returned darkly.

"Then you know there's been a good deal of talk?"

"Yes, and I know how it started, which you should have found out before you preached that sermon on sorcerers this morning," I returned without beating about the bush.

"Well, how did such a report start if there was no truth in it?" he demanded.

"I didn't say there was no truth in it," I began.

"Then you admit it!"

"No, I don't admit anything," casting about for some way to explain what I meant.

I tried to tell him about my visit to Sally, and the train of thought which had led me to speculate so heavily in immortality. But it is not easy to interpret a winged mood to a man who has literal-minded damnation ideas. As I repeated what I said to Sally about my ancient immortality and the fancy I had of seeing myself like the shades of all women coming and going through time, he looked even more horrified than Sally did. Tears of rage and mortification blinded me. I could not go on.

"You didn't claim to have been one of the Cleopatra girls?" he asked coolly.

"Don't you mention that to me again, Brother Hale," I evaded, seeing I could not make him understand.

"But this is a serious matter, Sister Thompson; it involves the difference between an evil spiritu-

ality and a pure spiritual life. I understood that in your conversation with Sister Parks you claimed to have been one of the Cleopatra girls, and——"

"There was only one of them, so far as I know," I interrupted. "Does anybody who knows me think I ever lived or looked like her? It's a shame upon you all that a woman who has been a consistent member of this church through all her inconsistencies can't exercise her spiritual imagination without being suspected of dark practices and relations to a misguided heathen female who's been dead several thousand years!"

"It was a most unfortunate occurrence, Sister Thompson, and has led to a scandal in the church," he said, as if he still blamed me.

But I was in no mood to be blamed.

"Yes, and do you know why? It's because of the evil mind in some good people, the desire they have for excitement. Instead of making moonshine whiskey they distill scandals at the expense of helpless people. And you, who would scorn to drink the one, will feed upon the other! On the other hand," I said, talking very fast because I saw that he wished to interrupt me, "I've known you to listen to something said about women for which the speaker should have been punished, without resenting that at all!"

"I never did!" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Brother Hale, you were present at the last Annual Conference, were you not?"

"Certainly, but——"

"Four hundred of your preachers and about half as many women were sitting upon the floor of the Conference when the bishop, enumerating the things to be thankful for, wound up with this: 'And I suppose there is not a man in this house who does not thank God that he was not born a woman!' And he the son of a woman! And the house filled with women who'd spent their lives working for him and the church, in spite of their efforts to serve just the Almighty!"

"But, Sister Thompson——"

"Why, I ask you, should anybody, man or woman, thank God for his or her gender? Is there any advantage before Him in being born a male? If you ask me, Brother Hale, I believe there's a plus mark put after every woman's name in the Book of Life! We have not fought the wars, or built the cities, or carried on the Dives business of amassing wealth in this present world; but we do keep the faith. What would happen if all the women in all the churches dropped out and went into business with the brethren? The pastors might still get their salaries, but your missionary collections would drop two-thirds; your Sunday-schools would dissolve into dancing

classes; the young people would leave the church. As for revivals, you wouldn't have any, and not a single conversion."

"Sister Thompson," he put in while I paused for breath, "what the bishop said is not the point at issue——"

"No," I interrupted; "you could sit there and hear something which humiliated every woman in the house, without protesting against the loutish pride he showed in just his sex, but you can come over here to chasten an old woman who has upheld the hands of preachers and served the church faithfully for forty years, because I had a fancy for gadding in the spirit through the land of Uz with Job and the prophets," I sobbed, whisking the tears angrily from my eyes.

"You went out of the land of Uz, Sister Thompson, and claimed to have been one of the Cleo——"

"Don't mention that woman's name to me again!" I exclaimed fiercely.

But he went on to explain that though he was sure I was guiltless of practising divination, it behooved a Christian woman to be careful what she said which might cause another to stumble, especially since we had that iniquitous organization, the Society for Psychic Research, preying upon the spiritual life of the community.

"Very well, Brother Hale, I'll bridle my tongue

in the future," I answered grimly as he took leave of me.

Since I have been so conscientious in recording the transgressions of others it is my duty to set down here the truth about myself in the days that followed. I backslid, and, like many another backslider, I started upon the downward grade with a deep sense of injury on my heart. But the Lord makes no allowance for our mortal sense of injustice. He holds us rigidly to the standard of returning good for evil, over and above all the other things we do to one another.

I had wished many times for the chance to take a rest from being the handmaiden of all works in our church. Now the opportunity had come, through no fault of mine; and I resolved to take a vacation from my Christian duties. Let some other woman be the church busybody! I reckon behind the door of my mind, my other mind was thinking about what would happen when I dropped out and left the other workers with the bag to hold, the seeds to sow, and the harvest to reap. But, I say, the Lord numbers such thoughts as these along with the hairs of your head, and He collects repentance for them along with your other transgressions.

I went to church the next Sunday. But instead of going up and taking my accustomed place be-

hind the choir, I dropped into the first seat I came to. This was in the extreme rear of the house. Doctor Edd was the only other person on it. He looked at me as much as to say: "What's the trouble? Have the heavens fallen?"

I paid no attention to him. I set my chin forward, dropped the corners of my mouth, lifted my eyes, and stared straight at the ceiling above the pulpit. Jonah sitting in his guard at noonday, with everybody staring at him, could not have felt more self-righteous.

Charlotte was president of the missionary society—let her remind Brother Hale of the meeting on Thursday! I said to myself vindictively. Naturally she did not do it, since I had always attended to that. I saw her look round and catch sight of me after Brother Hale made the announcements, omitting this one.

During the service which followed I was conscious that half the people in the house turned and stared at me from time to time. But I never once dropped my gaze from that knothole in the wall about six feet above the preacher's head. I remained seated bolt upright during prayers, which was the hardest thing of all to do. In spite of my efforts to remain calmly offended I felt the tears on my cheeks.

My custom is to go up after service and thank

the preacher for his sermon. I've done this many a time when he had made a flash in the pan or bored me so I could not keep awake, just to encourage him to do better if he could next time. But upon this day I flounced out of the door and across the street to my own house the minute the benediction was pronounced.

I did not go to the meeting of the missionary society. I sent the treasurer's books and my resignation by Molly Brown. Late the same afternoon she brought them back and said the society refused to accept my resignation. But I told her to keep them, that I was tired of walking the streets of Berton like a mendicant trying to collect dues. Let Sally Parks have the office. She was a good woman!

"You shouldn't do this way, Mary," Molly said, tenderly reproachful.

"I'm not doing any way, Molly; I've quit doing. I'm taking a rest," I answered serenely.

But the Lord alone knows how I suffered! I have never lived so blamelessly as a Christian as I now lived as a backslider. I remained at home, attended strictly to my own business, and talked about nobody, which was a privilege I had always enjoyed. Nothing went right. The church across the street accused me. I was very low in my spirit, and took rheumatism in my knees. But

when I got painfully down to say my prayers, the yeast had gone out of my petitions and they did not rise above my head. I could not pray with the same indignant fervour that sinners should return from the error of their ways and that backsliders should be reclaimed. The very heathen seemed to stare at me reproachfully from the ends of the earth, as if I'd forsaken and left them to perish in their idolatries.

Some people, with no holding-back straps to their minds, may prove that faith in God is an illusion, but no one can prove that about the religious life. It comes nearer fitting than any other kind of existence. It is the very glove of immortality. If you cease suddenly to do the things you've always done in His name, it is like giving up your citizenship in one country and becoming an alien in another without crossing your own threshold.

I was far from understanding this at first. I was like a poor old-lady Samson who went out and shook herself, and wist not that her strength had departed from her.

I was reduced to trying peptonoid Scriptures, like Emily Peters when she reads her devotional exercises. Some one had given me a little book that contained one hundred quotations from the Old and New Testament, designed like quick

remedies to meet any emergency of the soul without having to look for it. But none of those verses were written for me. They were for the woman I had been.

Still, something in me held out like the seven devils of perversity. A backslider will hold fast to his integrity and make less fuss about it than Job did.

After two or three weeks had gone by Sally Parks came in one day, looking very meek and awkward, as if she'd never been in this house before, and didn't feel free to come back to the kitchen, where I was making pies. I showed her into the parlour and took off my apron.

She told me all the news of the town, but I made no comment. She said she noticed I'd been keeping close at home lately, and she hoped it was not la grippe. I told her no, I was very well, "Thank you." She supposed I'd heard that Brother Hale was having trouble with the choir. I saw Lily Triggs! in capital letters on her lips, but I would not encourage her to say what the trouble was. The choir was as far from my thought as the East is from the West.

"I reckon you know Charlotte resigned as president of our missionary society," she ventured.

I did not know that either.

"Have you planted your garden?" I asked,

changing the subject so abruptly it was like casting Charlotte out of the window.

"No, I don't get time to do anything at home since we've had so much trouble keeping the society together. I'm president now, you know," she said with a sigh.

"My lettuce is coming up like little green curls and the radishes are ready for use," I put in cheerfully.

We went on talking at cross-purposes, she endeavouring to draw me back to church affairs, while I circled and evaded the subject, never implying by word or look that I'd ever been a Christian woman. When she arose to go she paused at the door, regarding me with the forlorn expression of a little old girl who wishes to be forgiven something.

"Mary," she began, "I make mistakes sometimes—we all do. I meant no harm when I told Charlotte about what you said to me that day, but——"

"If you see the Peters children as you go home, tell them their old cat has kittens in my woodshed," I said, interrupting as if I had not heard what she was trying to tell me.

"Very well, I will," she answered sadly, and went out.

I have always attended services in my own

church, even when the Baptists or Presbyterians had a celebrity to preach for them. But I planned now to make a Sabbath-day's journey abroad in the Gospel and worship with other denominations. I was excited over this adventure. It was like preparing for a visit to foreign parts.

The next Sunday I went to the Presbyterian Church. I felt very queer, with everybody staring at me during the singing of the first hymn. Doctor McAndrews read his sermon. I reckoned he always did, for the congregation sat as comfortably under it as if he were pasting it to them, one leaf at a time. But for me it was like having cold bread and ice water for breakfast when I'd been accustomed to hot biscuits and coffee. I went home chilled to the marrow of my spirit.

The following Sunday I went to the Baptist Church, which I should not have done if I had remembered this was Communion Day Doctor Fulton was already under way with his discourse when I came in. Whatever his text may have been, he preached long and earnestly upon the word "Baptidso." The sense of what he said was that no one need hope for the remission of their sins who slurred the meaning of that word. "You must be baptized!" he shouted with emphasis.

He was a good man. But how a good man could preach just a doctrine which excluded so many

other people from the Lord's mercies was a mystery to me.

When I was a child we had a Sunday-school song which ran something like this:

*Pull for the shore, sailor, pull for the shore!*
*Heed not the breaking waves but bend to the oar.*
*Safe in the lifeboat, sailor, cling to self no more,*
*Leave the poor old stranded wreck, and pull for the shore.*

But I was too young to read the words. What I thought they sang was:

*Leave that poor old strangled wretch behind and pull for the shore.*

This seemed to me a most barbarous and unchristian thing to do. I reckon it is the same way with me now about the Baptist doctrines—I miss the proper meaning.

The worst was yet to come. Doctor Fulton closed his sermon by emphasizing the rite of "close communion." The elect should not take the sacrament with sinners and outsiders.

I would not confess myself a sinner or an outsider by leaving. The deacons passed the bread and wine. When they came to the pew where I was sitting they skipped me as if I were a dropped stitch. I turned deathly homesick in a moment

for my own church, and for the people who were also taking this sacrament there before the altar.

I hope I should have done right in any case and gone back to my own church after this experience, but that night I came down with influenza which developed into pneumonia. The first person I saw when the red pain in my breast let go enough for me to get a good breath was Sally Parks bending over my bed.

"Sally," I whispered, "how many blooms are there on your Cape jasmine bush?"

"Hush, Mary dear. You are better, thank heaven! But Charlotte and I were frightened about you last night," she said tenderly.

"Did you say Charlotte was here, too?" I asked feebly.

"Every night while you were so bad off she was here. So many have called—Baptists and Presbyterians, too. And our pastor offered a special prayer for your recovery last Sunday."

I closed my eyes, deeply comforted, as if suddenly my transgressions melted away. This may be the reason why penitents weep. I felt the tears start.

"Sally," I began, whimpering weakly, "I feel like the prodigal son. And your kindness feels like the fine robe his folks ran out and put on him when he came home!"

The picture I had of myself—a fat old woman running off to strange churches and now bundled up so warm and easy in my own bed—made me laugh a little.

"Don't talk any more, dear!" she continued, smiling, too.

I was able to get out by Easter; but for a long time I felt as the wicked do after they turn from the error of their ways. I had a past to live down. But nobody in this church can say I didn't do it with proper energy and assurance. I just took hold where I left off, and went on holding my own in the spirit and out of it.

## CHAPTER IV

THE Scriptures prove that the Lord thinks well of widows. In the old Moab days a little grain was left after the harvest for them to pick up. Even the "unjust judge" had to grant the plea of the importunate widow, not because she was importunate—for this is the singsong characteristic of most women—but because she was a widow and had a hard time. It is the widow's mite that counts for more than the rich man's gift with Him. If you notice, widows are the ones who go about with their mites tied up in the end of their pocket handkerchiefs. I've seen Molly Brown keep the collection basket bobbing in Sam Parks' hand many a time while she untied the knot and squeezed out her penny. And you are commanded to visit them in their affliction, because He numbers them with the sparrows that fall.

The women best known for their good works and faithfulness among the early Christians were nearly all widows, like Phebe and Dorcas and Lydia. Maybe they could follow the will of their own spirits better, having no husbands to hinder

them. For husbands do have a powerful effect upon the morals of their wives. Many a good woman cannot serve God according to her conscience because she must serve her husband according to his will and feelings. If I could preach, I'd take Sapphira as my text, and I'd prove by the lives of the women I know that she never would have cheated the Lord, nor told that lie about the "possession" they sold, if Ananias had not made her do it. Women are generous to the church. But I can name half a dozen in this Methodist Church at Berton, married to prosperous men, who never give more than a widow's mite because they have no more to spare. And they are always telling Sapphira lies about that, for the same reason—to obey and shield an Ananias husband.

But I say the real widows make a good showing in the Scriptures. They are used in the best parables to teach the most comforting things. The kingdom of heaven is likened unto the leaven that a widow hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened. I have never seen a church yet where this yeast of the spirit was not furnished by widows and old maids, who are really virgin widows, and by some little pinched-pocket Sapphira wife who might as well be a widow.

But when it comes to the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees, you will find that chiefly among the brethren. And when Paul said, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," he was warning the Corinthian Christians against keeping a certain prominent man in the church whose morals had fermented.

Nearly every church has this evil leaven in it—some woman with damaged skylights in her reputation, or some man with the same kind of character who keeps a tight roof over his reputation. If it is a man, the apostle or the preacher discovers him and flings enough Scriptures in his direction to warn the innocent and to keep him in modest retirement; but if it is a little gilt-edged woman with the yeast of seven devils in her, he maneuvers the Gospel round her, never attacks her, never crosses the dead line of her influence. I do not know why this is, unless it is because a woman with seven devils is dangerously sacred.

Some people think Lily Triggs is this leaven in our church. I do not know. After observing her for four years I am still in doubt about her. But my doubts grow darker and my antipathy increases. That may be due to the evil mind in me, for I know, by experience as well as by observation, that the power of imputing sin to others is often very strong in Christian workers.

Lily may be the spirit of progress in this town, for all I know, patiently labouring to overcome our prejudices against the current of modern ideas. But if she is, progress looks most awfully like damnation to me. We have never produced anything like her in Berton. She has a nefarious use of her faculties, which could only have been acquired where sin is not sin, but the unfortunate result of environment; where virtue is custom, and righteousness is not righteousness but an old-fashioned bigotry which limits the constitutional rights of human nature to vaunt itself and have a good time. She is an individualist when it comes to this question of personal liberty, and will have her rights at the expense of whatever injury to society as a whole. But she is something of an anarchist and a socialist after she gets what she wants for herself, ready to destroy the order of things and lead a movement over the ruins of the way. In short, she is a very able woman, and there is nothing like her in the moral world except another woman of the same kind.

She has kept her place in the choir of this church with a fortitude under strictly feminine persecution which no good woman should have felt called upon to endure. She has lived down one scandal after another like a saint who is not

"LILY MAY BE THE SPIRIT OF PROGRESS IN THIS TOWN . . . . BUT IF SHE IS, PROGRESS LOOKS MOST AWFULLY LIKE DAMNATION TO ME"

a saint. She is eager to serve. If there is an entertainment to be given for the benefit of the church or parsonage, she is in the thick of it, with more and better plans for raising money than any one else can think of. If the district meeting is held in Berton she takes more delegates than anybody gets, including the presiding elder. The only time we have had a bishop to preach for us in four years he was entertained by Mrs. Lily Triggs and her aunt, Mrs. Browder—this "aunt" being an old rag-doll lady Lily has picked up to give an air of propriety and sanctity to her elegant establishment. If some one is in distress and needs help, her purse flies open while the rest of us are hesitating about how much we can afford to give. If it is the funeral of some woman who did not speak to her, Lily is there to sing with touching sweetness, "Shall We Gather at the River!"

From time to time there is a violent secret agitation in the church, stirred by the efforts we make to get her out of the choir. She remains artlessly ignorant of this opposition, though the town may be seething like a caldron with it. We invariably fall back defeated, and relieve our indignation by talking about her to the injury of our Christian attributes. But she never talks about any one, except to speak well of them.

She will not criticise her worst enemy. If she is a good woman she is the best woman in the church. And we have never been able to prove that she is not good. Every time we think we have caught her red-handed, she faces about with one of our own most cherished virtues clasped to her breast as a shield and buckler. When Maggie Fain was on the point of suing for divorce from Oscar and naming Lily as corespondent, what was our astonishment to learn that she had given up the idea, gone back to Oscar, and joined the Suffrage League. We heard later that Lily was developing the oldest Fain girl's voice, which she said was wonderful, and she hoped to see the child on the grand-opera stage some day. Maggie told this story with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

Lily had Molly Brown's unqualified support, because she paid Molly's grocery bill and "talked like an angel." Charlotte Warren was her devoted friend and running mate, because she said Lily was a brilliant woman with advanced ideas, wasting her talents in a little old one-horse town where she was not appreciated. They were like a police force corrupted with a compliment here, a good deed there, all contributed by Lily like the cleanest Christian charity.

We often had the same pastor returned to us for four years. But after Lily joined the choir

every preacher sent to this church was moved at the end of his first year. And the pathetic part of it was that they always expected to be returned and never knew why they were moved.

The negotiation of pastors is carried on privily between the presiding elder and influential members of the church. A pastor may leave for Conference with his assessments paid in full, and with every reason for believing that he has been acceptable to the people in his charge. But when the appointments are read he may find that he has been sent to another charge two hundred miles distant. He never knows why. Maybe he has offended a steward. Maybe he had a great revival, and many souls reclaimed, but only collected 30 per cent. of his assessments. So the presiding elders get together in the bishop's cabinet and trade preachers. Sometimes there is a little runt of an itinerant whom no elder wants in his district. He is given a mission in the mountains, or is sent as a "supply" to fill up a chink in the general work. If a young preacher shows marked evangelistic tendencies and grows faster in popularity with the people he serves than the elders think is good for the church—which may happen, owing to a reaction against emotional religion—they switch him off entirely by making him the "agent" for an educational institution or for some

general fund. I am not criticising these methods, you understand; I'm only telling how a church governed by a military system is conducted, with the bishops and thirteen elders as ranking officers.

Brother Worthen was Lily Triggs' first victim. He was an honest man and a good one, which made it all the easier for her to throw her bright dust in his eyes. He was our pastor, the husband of his wife, and Lily's Knight of the Garter, ready to defend her at the risk of his own reputation. Nothing was farther from his thoughts than that he would not be returned here when he left for Conference. But a preacher's wife is clairvoyant in these matters, and Brother Worthen was hardly out of town before Sister Worthen began to pack her things after the timid, surreptitious manner of her kind.

As a matter of fact, the stewards and trustees of our church—some of them members of the choir—had already notified the presiding elder of this district that they wanted Brother Worthen moved. They had no complaint to make, they wrote; he was a fine, genial gentleman, but not the man for Berton. They wanted a pastor with "some backbone."

We got him. Brother Hale had two backbones, so to speak. Instead of finding the harvest ripe and the labourers few on the outside of the church,

he sailed into the membership of the church itself, and undertook to weed the tares from the wheat, which is a thing no preacher can do without tearing up the church by the roots of its natural transgressions. He had trouble with the stewards and the Sunday-school superintendent, not to mention the trouble he stirred up with an old Dorcas like me. However, there is always an element in the church that supports such a preacher, and I reckon he would have been sent back the next year if he had not finally caught sight of Lily Triggs sitting like a limned twig in the choir. He put his whole mind upon Lily, but not in the terms of Christian charity. Still he was prudent, never openly preaching against more than the powder on her nose, which he did under the terms of "female vanity" and in a manner so general it applied to every woman who had flowers on her hat. Privately, however, he announced to the brethren that if he should be returned to Berton another year, he would have the Triggs woman out of the choir or abolish sacred music in the church.

Tom Warren went to Conference as lay delegate that year. He is the richest man in our church, and he can practically behead any preacher he does not like by cutting off his subscription to the pastor's salary. He demanded the removal of Brother Hale, really because Charlotte took this way of de-

fending Lily. What he charged against him was a "contentious spirit injurious to the harmony of the church," which was funny, considering that his line-fence feud with Roger Peters had split the very amen corners of it for ten years. Thus if we had a pastor who approved of Lily, he was removed for that. If we had one who disapproved of her, he was sure to be removed for that.

By this time she was firmly intrenched in the social life of the town. She was a pretty little tare who had fallen in good ground, the soil of a community overfed upon doctrines and foreign-mission literature and church festivals, unconsciously craving a change of diet, famished for the normal pleasures of life still in the flesh.

This is the turning-point in the family history of every church. And it just will turn, though you give your body to be burned and all your goods to feed the poor. You may call in the most eloquent evangelists and set all the Gospel forces of the church against it, but the thing happens, a revolution in the very spirit of that place which often leaves the Christian people tagging along behind, vainly swinging to the coat tails of a wicked and perverse generation which was born in the church and bred upon its faith. One explanation and another is given for this phenomenon. Far be it from me to name the trouble, if it is a trouble or

merely a natural earth reaction from too much sky culture.

But I will venture this—that in the case of the herd of swine, mentioned in Matthew, which had the devils cast into it, went crazy, ran and jumped into the sea, and perished because of the evil spirits which possessed it, one of them was progress and the other was art. For the records of history all prove that this is what happens every time the spirit of progress and the spirit of art get control of a civilization. It tumbles down a "steep place" in the next century, perishes, and has to be built up again, always by the Christian religion.

As I have said before, Lily Triggs may have been the spirit of progress leavening the town. Berton certainly did take on a strange new life. Women who formerly invited you to dinner in the middle of the day gave receptions in the tail of the afternoon and served punch at the front door. Or there was a lecture on suffrage, with refreshments afterward. Or a strange woman came to town and gave a parlour interpretation of Parsifal at the residence of Mrs. Lily Triggs, for Lily said Berton was wofully lacking in the knowledge and appreciation of the great operas.

You may always know where a community is in the scale of things, without reading a history of European morals or even current literature, by

simply observing the popular topics of conversation. They register exactly how near those people are to the "steep place."

If the men are still discussing apostasy and foreordination around the stove in the back of the grocery store you may take it for granted that there is not much enterprise in the community; and that the women and preachers are striving for foreign missions and for a deeper work of grace; and that at least once a year there is a gracious revival during which sinners repent, backsliders are reclaimed; and that many of these live wholly consecrated lives without causing two blades of grass to grow where only one grew before, commercially speaking.

But if the men are talking politics and of the possibility of a new railroad to open up that section, this is a sign of the awakening of the community to certain natural advantages and of the rise in the price of real estate. The women are the posters who advertise the whole thing with their little competitions in the simpler transgressions of fashions and what may be called first steps in worldly ambitions. But they are still loyal to the church.

If, on the other hand, the men organize a club in the top room of the village hotel, where they spend a good deal of time mysteriously; if they dis-

cuss the Karl Marx theory of government, cotton futures and industrial conditions, you will find the women studying art, defending the Motif of Horror in decadent dramas, and very busy starting the Feminist Movement. This is a sign that the pastor receives a large salary, that the president of the Woman's Missionary Society is an old frump who does not know how to move in social circles nor how to catch step in the annual suffrage parade, and that the church is dead.

Berton was not so far gone as this. But the leaven was working. The City Improvement Company was organized. There was some talk of putting up a moving-picture theatre. The report of an expert accountant, employed by a disgruntled element in the town council to go over the county tax books, had been suppressed. The Ladies' Art Committee planned an exhibition of original paintings in the fall. And at a meeting of the Woman's Missionary Society, Charlotte Warran referred to the Acts of the Apostles as "one of the most beautiful epics to be found in all literature." But about this time some of Lily Triggs' chickens came home to roost, and the progressive spirit in social circles had a backset.

Judson Winter was a young attorney here. He was also one of Lily's musical discoveries. During the previous year he spent much of his time culti-

vating his voice in the evenings at Lily's house. Later, when Sam Parks resigned from the choir, Judson took his place. Then, quite unexpectedly, he married Dorothy Allen. Dorothy was a member of our church and chairman of the executive committee in the Suffrage League.

But when the young couple returned from their honeymoon Judson resigned from the choir, and Dorothy did not even go through the ceremony of resigning from the Suffrage League. She simply met Lily face to face one day on the street and refused to speak to her. This was all we knew, but it was enough to furnish fuel for smouldering fires.

Lily dismissed the whole situation in her characteristic manner. She said she was sorry to lose Judson. He had a splendid voice, but of course one could not expect a bridegroom to attend choir practice, and he had done quite right to resign. It was all right, for she had persuaded Brother Lipton to sing bass.

Even the bravest may be too bold. This is what I thought when I saw John Henry Lipton sitting beside Lily in the choir the next Sunday singing bass out of the same hymn book with her. For Taggy is John Henry's wife. She is one of those nervous women who keeps her feelings wound up as tight as a watch spring. Her marital motto is: "I can stand just so much and no more!" When

she reaches her limit something happens. If nothing did happen Taggy would explode. She is combustible. She has managed John Henry for twenty years with her nervous spells.

He is a big, fine-looking man with a florid complexion and a cheerful disposition. He swaggers a little when he walks, stands up on his hind legs when he sings, and always backs the church like a good citizen instead of a sad saint. He is the best Sunday-school superintendent we ever had.

When he joined the choir and made himself so useful to Lily, helping her put on her wraps after services and bringing her a glass of water between services, and slipping notes to her during services about which hymns to sing, I said it made me nervous.

One afternoon I went to call on Sister Battle, our pastor's wife. She was a large, placid woman with a round, middle-aged figure and a middle-aged mind, with that kind of resignation one sometimes sees upon the face of a preacher's wife who knows all her tribulations by heart and fears them not at all.

"I was just wishing some one would come in," she said, shaking the cat off the cushion in the rocking-chair and drawing it closer to the fire for me.

"How are you?" she asked comfortably.

"I have a bad cold," I said, hurrying to get out my handkerchief.

"Mr. Battle has one, too," she confided.

"Everybody seems to have one," I agreed.

"I can always tell when I'm taking one," she explained. "The back of my neck gets cold."

We went on for some time, telling each other about how this ailment and that affected us, the way women do sometimes, until presently we both fell silent and exchanged glances the way women do when they have been talking about one thing and thinking about another.

"Have you seen Sister Lipton lately?" she asked presently.

"No. Why?"

"She was not at church Sunday. I thought maybe she might have a bad cold."

"She hasn't been to church in a month," I answered reflectively.

"You are good friends, aren't you?" she asked, gently leading me to talk about Taggy.

"I've known her since she was a girl, and I've known John Henry since she married him. Naturally I'm fond of them both," I answered, wondering what she had in her mind.

"They have been happy together, I suppose."

"Happy is a young adjective, Sister Battle. I should never apply it to the relation of two people

who've been married twenty years. Taggy knows how to manage her husband, if that is what you mean."

"Sometimes when a woman is married to a fine-looking man she is inclined to be jealous—without cause " she remarked.

"Every wife has one cause to be jealous of her husband," I answered coolly.

"And what is that?" she asked in mild surprise.

"She is not the only woman in the world!" I laughed.

"Dear me, Sister Thompson, you surely don't think that is a just cause for jealousy!" she exclaimed.

"No, only a natural cause, which she may never consider at all. But she keeps putting it behind her like Satan so long as she lives. Now tell me about Taggy. What is the trouble?" I asked, coming straight to the point

"Perhaps I ought not to say anything about it —such a distressing affair."

"Well, if it has anything to do with Lily Triggs and John Henry, you may as well tell what you know. The whole town is talking already."

"The truth is, Sister Lipton sent for Mr. Battle this morning. She was in a great state. Mr. Battle thinks she was hysterical," she began.

"Oh, she would be. Taggy is always hysterical," I put in.

"She said she had found a note from Mrs. Triggs in Brother Lipton's pocket——"

"Naturally. It was about the Easter music, I'll warrant. Lily's at her worst when she writes about anthems!" I interrupted again.

"I think it was, in fact, but she told Mr. Battle that no good woman would write to a married man that way about Jerusalem the Golden. She said our choir was the sinkhole of iniquity, and that Mrs. Triggs' feet—well, I will not tell what she said about her feet. She said the note indicated that the relations between her and Brother Lipton were sentimental, to say the least of it——"

"On Lily's part, of course," I sniffed, "but that ought not to prove John Henry guilty."

"So Mr. Battle tried to make her believe, but she was so wrought up she told him if he didn't put Mrs. Triggs out of the choir she would publish her to the world, and leave the church herself."

"Publishing Lily will do no good. Everybody knows her and nobody knows her," I commented.

"And that is not the worst of it," Sister Battle went on.

"Don't tell me she sent for Lily!" I exclaimed.

"No, but this afternoon, just before you came,

Brother Lipton called. You wouldn't have known him!" she exclaimed, deeply sympathetic.

"Oh, yes, I should. They all look the same way when Lily passes them up—innocent and wilted!"

"He explained everything, said he had done nothing wrong. 'Brother Battle,' he said, 'my wife's an angel and I'm as innocent as she is. I'm as true to her as she is to me!' But he handed in his resignation as Sunday-school superintendent —and would you believe it, that poor man left this house with the tears streaming from his eyes. Now what are we to do?" she concluded.

"If the Lord in His wisdom saw fit to call Lily for solo service in the celestial choir, it would help this church and soothe the heart of every woman in it. But He won't," I sighed.

"Something must be done. How will the church take his resignation as Sunday-school superintendent?" she insisted.

"Oh, the church need never hear of that. Brother Battle must not accept it. Meanwhile, I'll go round and see what I can do with Taggy," I said, rising and putting on my things.

I found her lying crosswise upon the bed. The shades were down and the room was so dark I could barely see her. She had a piece of brown paper soaked in vinegar on her head, which is

the remedy she uses for sick headaches. Both feet dangled over the side of the bed as if she'd lost the use of her legs. Her arms were spread wide, at right angles to her body, which made her look like an abbreviated cross in a gingham dress. I never saw anything look so flat unless it was a dead battercake on a cold griddle. I doubt if there is a married woman in the world who does not know that supine anguish as a familiar experience. No matter how good a man is to his wife, she will fling this kind of fit occasionally and give up her ghost. Maybe it is because he scorned a favourite dish or forgot to kiss her when he left the house. Any little thing will bring it on if she's in the fit-flinging mood. Oh, she can remember the time when he never forgot to kiss her, and when what she cooked for him "tasted like manna from heaven!"

"Sick headache, Taggy?" I asked, bending over the footboard of the bed.

She rolled her head from side to side in a feeble negative.

"Summer complaint?" I asked.

"No," she moaned.

"Then it's Lily Triggs!" I announced calmly.

Her mouth went up in the middle and down at the corners. Her face worked until it looked the little old worn-out mask of a great tragedy.

"I suppose it's all over town by this time," she whispered, rending herself with a sob.

"No, it is not, but it will be if you don't get up from here and take a hand in the game," I said coolly.

"Game!" she wailed. "I'm a good woman, Sister Thompson; I can't plan such a game."

"That's what's the matter with half the good women—they leave the other kind to play it and win it!" I sniffed, feeling round in the dark for a chair to sit on.

"What can I do?" she asked.

"You can get up from here, powder your face, curl your hair, put on your best frock, and meet your poor John Henry with a smile when he comes home," I advised.

"Oh!" she moaned, as if I'd asked the dead to smile.

"You can tell him you are sorry you've made such a goose of yourself and you know he is not to blame," I said severely; and then added: "He is not to blame. You are the one at fault."

"I!" she cried, as if I had pierced her with hot irons. "What have I done but endure and endure for months in silence?"

"Yes, you are and I am—all the decent women in this town are to blame who have stood by like pale worms of the dust and allowed a pink-faced

grass widow with a blond wig and divorce-court morals to run this town and even our church like a Punch-and-Judy show for her own amusement," I repeated indignantly.

"Haven't we tried to get rid of her?" she sobbed.

"No, you only wanted to do that. What you really did was to countenance her by joining her Suffrage League," I answered accusingly.

"But I've always been in favour of suffrage for women, Sister Thompson!"

"So have I, Taggy. But I wouldn't join the angel band if I saw the devil leading it. I should know there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere. And that's what's the matter with the suffrage in this country now. Too many women flirting round in the movement who should be in institutions of correction. It gives the men a conscientious but dishonest excuse for opposing the ballot for the rest of us." I said all this speaking very fast, for my heart burned within me.

Taggy sat up and looked at me. She was a drolly pathetic figure with that brown-paper plaster still sticking to her forehead. Her eyes were red, her lids swollen with dark circles beneath, and her neck appeared wofully long, like the withered stem of a withered rose. Women

do demand much of their husbands when they expect to be loved for just their virtues. Somewhere in the town at that moment, I reflected, Lily Triggs was prancing about, perfumed with that carnation talcum powder she uses, with a Madonna fichu spread like snow over her shoulders and the toes of her slim slippers peeping in and out like dusty lily petals from beneath her pretty skirts.

"What can I do, I feel so helpless?" Taggy said presently.

"Stop blaming John Henry. A woman only confesses defeat when she accuses her husband about another woman," I began, for I saw it comforted her to have me take sides with him.

"You don't know how far this thing has gone. We can never be the same to one another again. Oh!" she wailed, flinging herself back in another fit.

"Now, Taggy, you just stop that and listen to me," I chided. "You have the situation in your hands. All you have to do is to act, and act right now!"

"Well, if I can, I will," she answered, recovering herself with a kind of dying sigh.

"When she wrote that note to John Henry——"

"What! How did you know she had written to him?" she exclaimed, horrified.

"I was sitting behind the choir during Easter services and saw her pass it to him," I explained,

determined not to give the preacher and his wife away. "Now you must answer it," I began again.

"But you don't know what was in it, and I'd die before I'd show it to a living soul!" she cried.

"Oh, yes, I do. She said she hoped some day they'd be singing this beautiful anthem, "Jerusalem the Golden," in Paradise, where there was nothing sordid or earthly to keep souls from sweet and perfect communion—something like that," I concluded.

"How did you know what she said to him?" Taggy gasped in amazement.

"I know Lily, my dear, and her kind. They all deal in the terms of celestial purity and innocent love when they fish for singing trout in the church choir. It's a kind of phosphorescent bait they angle with, and that is the worst they do. You never will catch one of them," I explained, and went on about the letter she should write.

"Begin it this way: '*Dearest Lily*: My husband has shown me the note you have written to him——"

"But he didn't," she interrupted. "If only he had! He concealed it from me. I found it tucked away in—in his watch pocket, wadded up as small as that!"

"Naturally he didn't want you to see it. A man saves his wife the offense of such things," I explained, secretly irritated at John Henry, but de-

termined to clear him of his sneaking flirtation for his wife's sake.

However, it is very hard to inspire the right cunning in a good woman whose veracity lacks the elasticity which is necessary when you are saving your husband from a lady serpent after he has ceased to struggle. We finally composed a letter to Lily between us, I furnishing Taggy's lisping, stammering pen with the words of wisdom. It read thus:

Dearest Lily:

I appreciate the beautiful note you wrote my husband yesterday. It indicates the quality of your character and the sweet instincts you have for celestial companionship in Paradise, where we are told that there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage and where everybody is divorced.

The Suffrage League is familiar with your social and economical ideals in this present world, but few of the women have been able to understand this side of your character though we have wondered about it a great deal. So I am taking the liberty of including this letter you sent to John Henry as a part of the program of our next Thursday's meeting at Mrs. Warren's. I shall read it under the head of current events, which you know is my share of the report. Be sure and come for we shall need you to explain one or two of the more spiritual passages.

Cordially yours,

Tabitha Lipton.

"But," cried Taggy in despair when we finished, "I can't read that scandalous note of hers to fifty women. It would ruin John Henry!"

"You had better ruin him than leave her to do it," I snapped. "But, you goose, don't you know she will never risk it? She'd stick her head in the fire first. Take my advice, send this note, sit steady in the boat and wait for what happens."

She agreed, as a relative sometimes agrees to a dangerous operation with the forlorn hope of saving a dear one's life. By way of making sure that her nerve did not fail her, I took the letter to the post-office on my way home and mailed it.

Sally Parks dropped in to see me on her way home from the league Thursday.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked.

"No. Nothing bad, I hope," I answered, feeling strangely elated and guilty at the same time.

"Lily Triggs has gone to a sanitarium!"

"Health failed?" I inquired innocently.

"She's a nervous wreck!" Sally answered with a sigh. "You know how hard she works, takes no care of herself. Charlotte thinks the choir practice for that Easter anthem was the last straw."

"I expect it was," I said dryly.

"We can't carry on the work of the league without her and we must give up the art exhibit.

Everybody was so distressed this afternoon when Charlotte broke the news to us," she went on.

"Then she will return?" I asked coldly.

"Oh, yes, she's just going to take a long rest. She hopes to be able to carry on the work more vigorously next winter. Meanwhile, she suggested that we drop the league altogether. She thought it would be better to do nothing than to make mistakes, as we should without her guiding hand. So we disbanded this afternoon. We only had a social meeting," she explained innocently.

"Didn't even have the current events with your tea?"

"No. Charlotte said she'd promised Lily not to move hand or foot in the work until her return. We all thought that was best."

Then she looked at me reproachfully, for I was laughing.

"I can't understand you, Mary Thompson," she cried indignantly. "You don't seem to realize what a good thing the league is, and how helpful Lily has been in so many ways. She is so capable. But you don't appreciate her!"

"Yes, I do, Sally. I recognize her gifts and I appreciate her more than you do. She's just too smart for a little place like Berton," I answered, still laughing at the vision I had of Taggy trembling with fear at the narrow escape she had had.

When I recall the men and women who have done the most good in Berton, they are not those with the greatest gifts and the broadest culture.

But they are the simpler kind, who believe in infant baptism because they are told to believe in it —or in infant damnation, for that matter, if they are told to believe in that; who have no minds of their own with which to think out the esoteric problems of life and death, but accept these as the shadows of mysteries through which they must pass by faith. They inflict wounds and bind up wounds, never keeping a very straight account of who is to blame. They forgive much, and are ever ready to do something else, sure that this also will be forgiven. Not reasonable—just children, you understand, who must go a long way to school, but who return in the evening of their days to their Father's house, every one spent, very tired. Dull scholars, having missed half the lessons taught in the hard curriculum of life, but all finished at last. I say these are the best people the world over, though they lead no great reforms and start no revolutions. It is not until you get as bad and as wise as Solomon that you throw down your pen and cry, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." There is a good deal of vexation mixed with the foolishness of faith, but one thing I have learned—never to look to a bad man like Solomon for the right

wisdom, and never to follow a woman whose mind is so broad her morals are split, no matter if everything she says is the truth. What she does is bound to be a lie.

The period following Lily Triggs' departure from Berton was the last term we had in our church of the old-fashioned Christian life. We were shortly to be tried by standards so old that they were new. We were to experience anguish and uncertainties which rent the membership as it had never been rent by our feuds and transgressions, and from which the church has never recovered. But I say, for a season we returned to the old order. The life of the community centred once more about the church and Sunday-school and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. The Feminist Movement appeared to have lost consciousness. I could spend the afternoon visiting, and never hear a word about how the suffragists lost the election in New Jersey or how they won the ballot in some Western state. The choir in our church expanded and contracted from time to time according to the Sabbath-singing mood of the members. No one attended choir practice; any one who chose flatted his or her notes on Sunday. Still, it gave me a restful feeling to hear Evalina Lipton and Sam Parks and Susie King merely dragging the words of the hymns by the hind legs

of the tune—which is a repose I never had when Lily put the fancy trills into

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,*
*Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!*

I may have been wickedly prejudiced against Lily. I have set down in these pages all the evidence we ever had against her which was circumstantial. But many a man has been convicted of murder upon less damaging evidence.

Quarterly meetings are a great occasion among Methodists, especially in village and country churches. For three months the pastor takes his texts from the meeker Scriptures like the Gospel according to John, but when the presiding elder comes we expect a change, and we get it. Everybody brisks up. The woman who is to have the honour of entertaining him is in a swivet for days beforehand. She cleans her house from attic to cellar, as if he might be the higher critic of her domestic life. She tears the guest chamber to pieces, puts it together again, covers the puffed-up bed with her fringed counterpane and lays her sacred shams, embroidered with "Holy Night, Peaceful Night," upon the pillows. She bakes cakes, sets yeast to rise for his favourite bread, and offers up her finest chickens. One might think she prepared for a regiment instead of for one

man. But he is the presiding elder, next to the bishop in the Annual Conference, and equal as a rule to several men when it comes to nourishing his inner man. All of which we know and even the fowls know, for they are shy of their own roosting places for a week afterward.

We know what to expect on Sunday, a "great sermon." He may preach the same one four times in succession at the different churches. But you can depend upon one thing—he will take his text from one of Paul's Epistles. Bishops and presiding elders always do. The character of Paul seems to appeal to them more than the other apostles. The pastor will have been giving us sermons on "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," or "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," and has been at great pains to prove the truth of this in spite of the grave mortal suspicions we have to the contrary. But on this day he reads the opening service and then comes down and sits in the congregation, with the air of a famished and thirsty man who is about to have a feast of good things. Then the elder takes his text from Paul. And he begins with an interpretation of this great presiding elder of the early church. If he is himself a small, nervous, bald-headed man he is sure to tell us that Paul was

a nervous bald-headed man. If he is a large man with a majestic manner, he pictures Paul as a giant, with the power of presence which belongs only to great souls. In any, case the congregation often realizes that there is a striking resemblance between this famous itinerant, who had "no continuing city," and the presiding elder of our district.

I am not in a position to know, being strictly a Methodist in my church experiences, but I have wondered if the Baptists and Presbyterians magnify the character of Paul as we do. And I am not suggesting the least criticism of the bishops and elders in our church who choose him instead of Peter or John or James more particularly as their pattern, for I suppose if a man is able to exalt himself into the Pauline consciousness he is more apt to live like Paul. Certainly many of them sustain a relation to the itinerant pastors very similar to that he had for Timothy. They are very helpful, tender, and fatherly to them. But my experience is that you cannot live through the weekdays of your life sustained by a presiding elder's sermon, with the same intimate sense of personal security which comes from remembering what your own two-by-four pastor tells you.

The point is this: When the presiding elder preaches upon the "great fundamentals of the

Christian life," until the reverberations ring back from your eternal hills, when the church is filled with half the town, and everybody goes away to a big dinner and to tell what a great sermon it was—I say all this clothes a quarterly meeting in a glamour which conceals the real purpose of it.

This comes out in the Quarterly Conference, which is a strictly business affair even if it is held on Sunday afternoon. The pastor, stewards, and Sunday-school superintendent meet at the church, with the presiding elder in the chair. The preacher in charge is called on for his report. He mentions how many new members have been received, how much has been paid on salary, how much on church extension, foreign missions, and so on. The Sunday-school superintendent does the same thing, tells how much the children paid on Children's Day, so much for missions, so much for literature, incidentals, and so on. The stewards do the same things. They add up the totals. The elder takes his per cent. of the preacher's salary, puts on his hat, and catches the next train out of town.

It is all for the best, of course. I am not writing this history to criticise the government of our church. But my belief is that this is where the likeness between a presiding elder and the Apostle Paul grows so faint as to be hardly dis-

tinguishable. If Timothy had a wife and two children when he was pastor of the church at Ephesus, and received only nineteen dollars during the first three months, I doubt if Paul would have come along as presiding elder and taken two or three dollars of it as his share. I have known that to happen here. And every time I see an elder vaulting through the empyrean of eloquence, with the Pauline Epistles in one hand and the Fundamentals of the Christian life in the other, I cannot help thinking of the way Brother Battle looked when he paid the elder his per cent. of that nineteen dollars.

With a membership of two hundred and fifteen this church paid that year twenty-one hundred dollars all told. The pastor's salary was seven hundred and eighty dollars. The presiding elder received one hundred and sixteen of that, leaving him with only six hundred and sixty-four dollars. And there was not a man in our church with an income equal to this presiding elder's salary!

Brother Battle had a wife and two children. And he was obliged to keep a horse. He was also, by the laws of the Methodist Discipline, obliged to keep out of debt.

I feel about the financial demand of our church as I do about the whale's swallowing Jonah—I do not understand it and I do not understand

them. I lack the world breadth of vision required to make and sustain a great Christian organization. So I just accept the miracle of Jonah, and go on collecting dues for our missionary society, leaving the Lord to deal with the appropriation boards as He sees fit later on. Most of the members of this church feel the same way. Sometimes, however, I have been discouraged enough about converts in heathen nations to wonder if it would not be less expensive if we sent for the heathens and educated them here as foreign missionaries to their own people, instead of sending our own missionaries to them. A Christian heathen can live on much less than one of our missionaries. And he ought to do as much good.

But this is no affair of mine, and I always feel guilty when I have such thoughts, especially when I consider the raven-fed faith of Methodist itinerants. They are never poor in spirit. They are rich in the knowledge they have of long years before them in the work. They keep up the simplest and most childlike defenses against poverty, being always desperately poor. They have widows' and orphans' funds which do not pay enough to bury the widows and orphans.

But you cannot starve a Methodist preacher, nor get him in debt, nor tempt him to steal from his own church collections, and you will never

see his children begging bread. I have known one with a wife and baby to live on two hundred and forty dollars a year, and save enough to pay their railway fare across the state to his next appointment. No man can doubt the miracle of the loaves and fishes who knows anything about the miracle in domestic economy wrought every year by Methodist itinerants. They are artlessly generous, like children, and strangely confiding in their dealings with the grasping world. Faith is a habit of mind with them which reaches cheerfully to the mercies of God when there are no mercies in sight, and back again to any man mean enough to deceive them. I have never known one to show any cunning in his own carnal affairs except when it came to a horse trade.

The Lord himself seems to inspire a Methodist preacher with supernatural shrewdness when he goes out to buy a horse. He invariably returns with a sound beast and something to boot in his pocket, even when he has traded a hammer-headed, goat-hammed nag to the other fellow. This, in fact, is the initial step in the transaction. He picks up a horse which appears to have been assembled from different zoölogical periods—the lumbering shanks of a mastodon, the hunched-up back of a dromedary, and the ribs of any old skeleton; a sort of equine hyperbole of sorrowful nega-

tion. But, given time, he will always swap this thing for a good horse.

We had an example of this shrewdness and the itinerant's curious guilelessness in our own pastor. Brother Battle acquired in some manner known only to the Providence which assists in these matters a very fine gray mare. She was a slender-legged, thin-flanked young thing, that held her head like a proud maiden, carried her tail airily over the dashboard, and spurned the earth with her feet. If she had a fault in the world, which her master stoutly denied, it was pulling the peg out of the fastening on the barn door and helping herself to what she found inside.

One morning I heard groans accompanied by loud screams of anguish from the barnyard of the parsonage. I ran to the window and stood in amazement at the scene across the street. A score of men hung over the fence before the barn. They were shouting directions to a dozen more who were inside. Sister Battle stood in her kitchen door looking as if the worst had happened at last. The two children were wailing disconsolately, with their faces pressed to the pickets of the back fence. Brother Battle, wearing his long-tail coat, occupied the centre of the stage. He held the gray mare by the bridle and was walking her up and down with great difficulty, for the horse seemed deter-

mined to sit down at every step. She was at least twice her normal size round the middle. Her head drooped, her back arched, and her tail was clasped between her legs in a kind of anguished horse prayer.

"Don't let her lie down!" shouted a voice.

"If she does she's gone!" cried another.

"She's as good as dead anyhow," growled another. At which the children keened their noses to the wind with ear-piercing shrieks.

"What on earth is the matter?" I panted, having run across the street and joined Sister Battle.

"Poor Daisy pulled the peg out of the door again last night and ate all the peas we had for the cow!" she moaned.

"How many peas did you have?" I asked.

"About half a bushel," she admitted reluctantly, as if she shrank from telling how drunk Daisy had made herself on cowpeas.

At this moment the horse went down. She lay with her legs sticking up like the standard of a canvas wagon top.

The crowd dispersed, having given up hope. Sister Battle and I hurried into the house bearing the bereaved children.

Half an hour later Brother Battle came in, wearing the redeemed look a preacher always puts on when he has had an answer to prayer.

"Well, we are going to save her!" he answered. "I have secured the services of a veterinary."

"A veterinary!" I exclaimed. "There is not one in this town."

"He has just moved in—lives some distance out on a farm, he told me. He will take the horse home with him presently. Says she will be as good as new in a couple of weeks. But I had to pay him eleven dollars!" he added ruefully.

"Eleven dollars, Joseph!" gasped Sister Battle.

"Yes. He wanted more, but I told him that was all I had."

Ten days later they received a note from the veterinary saying that the mare had died.

Brother Battle made application at once to the Asburg Remounting Association. This is an organization of circuit riders in this Conference which furnishes one hundred dollars toward the purchase of another horse when a member of it loses one.

A private collection among the sympathetic church members added to this sum fifty dollars. And Brother Battle started in high feather to the neighbouring town where a young mare was advertised for sale.

The horse proved to be his own mare, Daisy! The owner of the stables bought her from a band of strolling gypsies ten days after the "veterinary"

took her and eleven dollars to boot from our pastor.

The reports of the Asbury Remounting Association show that more than one circuit rider has been obliged to return the hundred dollars sent him, owing to the miraculous reappearance of a horse which he mourned as dead.

All told, the year was passing peacefully, as if time had gone back and joined the church. Our lives were measured once more to us by our prayers and aspirations toward the life to come. There was no competition of other interests against those of the church, no Suffrage League meeting to interfere with the attendance of the members of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, no lectures on art, no committees devoted to the solving of social and economical problems. Everything was so peaceful that we might have thought Satan had restored the stolen goods of the spirit in this place. The people drifted back into their old ways of attending divine services. Our prayer meetings were midweek events. Sometimes at the close of an unusually impressive sermon Brother Battle would say: "All those who desire to flee from the wrath to come, or long for a deeper work of grace, will please signify the same by coming forward and giving their hand to the pastor during the singing of the last hymn."

Then Susie King would bring her fingers down upon the organ keys in dolorous chord. The choir would clear its throat, everybody would rise, and we would all begin to search ourselves.

*Am I a soldier of the cross,*
*A follower of the Lamb?*
*And shall I fear to own His cause,*
*Or blush to speak His name?*

Then Susie would get the best of it with the organ again, and we would look about and wonder why this one or that one did not accept the invitation.

"Last stanza!" Brother Battle would say, looking very mournful because nobody accepted the invitation. And we'd begin again:

*Sure I must fight if I would reign;*
*Increase my courage, Lord!*
*I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,*
*Supported by Thy word.*

Then Molly Brown would slip by the other people in her pew and step timidly forward to give her hand. Molly is our bellwether ewe in spiritual adventures. Once she moves out the rest of us follow. The congregation winds itself in and out, a long line. Everybody goes up and

gives some kind of a hand, and the pastor is kept very busy saying to each one, "God bless you!" while only the choir is left to sing the chorus:

*We will stand the storm,*
*We will anchor by and by!*

I do not say that great music has less effect, but I doubt if any grand opera ever sung has so good an effect upon just simple, honest folk as a service like this. We go home and commit our peculiar besetting sins as usual. But these are only the hobnail shoes of our carnal nature by which we keep our feet amid the affairs of this present world. We know that somehow, by and by, we'll set sail, stand the storm, and anchor somewhere, in spite of a few little deeds done strictly in the body. This is faith. And we are all the children of faith, the offsprings of immortal hopes, more than we are the sons and daughters of the flesh.

No great poet ever had a lively sense of humour, because wit is the blasphemy of high emotions. And no great saint ever had a sense of humour, either, because the scenery of the soul is incredibly majestic in its lights and shadows. Still, the annals of every church are filled with stories absurdly out of drawing with this dignity of eternal life. It is because we are still in the childhood of

time, subject to the comic accidents of our own human natures.

We had the usual humorous accidents during this peaceful year. First, Emily Peters went off somewhere and joined the Christian Scientists. This was not funny. It was the first wise thing I ever knew Emily to do. But if she had eloped with a Christian Scientist some of our members would not have been more scandalized than they were when the news came. Then Emily came home well and strong. But that which set us all to grinning was the way she talked, in the language of a kind of dissolved mysticism. She who had been the dullest and simplest of women now confounded the wise with her new evangelism. Sin was not sin, but an "error." Neuralgia, from which she had suffered tortures, was also an "error."

"If I'd only known, Sister Thompson," she exclaimed one day, "that there is no such thing as sickness, disease, sorrow, and death, that they are all errors!"

"But, my dear," I objected, "surely you know we must all die some time!"

It was as if I had blown a strong wind against her fragile wings.

"We must not admit death," she returned in tones of awe; "that is the greatest error of all."

"You'll admit that many people are subject to this error," I insisted.

"We must not think of death," she answered, growing very nervous. "Thinking it commits us to it."

I was ashamed of myself, as if I'd cast a stone at a bluebird perched too glaringly in the snow.

She was blessed with a kind of premature immortality of the mind, so I went no farther, even consenting when she offered to give me absent treatments for rheumatism. Both my knees have grown sadly, stiffly erroneous, and I expected no benefit; but my thought was that if she occupied her mind with my ailments, she was not so likely to backslide into her own neuralgia.

And there was the incident of Sam Parks' raincoat being up for prayers, which I reckon was one of the most horrifyingly funny things that ever happened in this church. When penitents come to the altar for prayers in our church, sometimes one remains still kneeling after the others are gone and the service concluded. In this case the preacher and other spirit-comforting saints remain and pray with him until he receives the blessing, which is sure to come if he has the true wrestling-Jacob courage.

We were in the midst of our revival late in August of that year. The altar was filled with

penitents at the close of each service. One evening the weather was threatening and Sam Parks brought his raincoat. He came in early and hung it over the knob of the low post which supported the end of the altar.

When the penitents returned to their seats as usual after the concluding prayer Brother Battle looked about him. He was nearsighted, but he saw dimly what he supposed to be a particularly meek penitent kneeling in the shadows at the extreme end of the chancel.

"Brethren!" he exclaimed, raising his hand, "we still have one earnest soul kneeling here seeking forgiveness. Let us unite in prayer once more for him!"

There was a moment of ghastly silence. No one knelt, no one even bowed his head. Our attention was riveted upon Brother Battle, who advanced toward the wofully shrunken form. The next moment he stretched out his hand benignly and laid it upon the newel post draped with Sam's coat. He started back as if he'd been stung.

"We will receive the benediction!" he announced sternly. And we did, but the Lord must have wondered at the tartness with which this blessing was asked.

Sam sneaked out and went home in the rain, not daring to claim his coat after what had happened.

I heard a man say, who sometimes stumbled over his wife's footstool in the dark, that the devil entered mere things as often as he did men. Maybe he does, for I have known more than one revival to freeze after some such incident as this. We appear to be hung on a hair trigger spiritually, between the sublime and the ridiculous.

. . . . . .

Early in October Lily Triggs returned to Berton. The good may be remembered by their virtues, but so long as we live we are tagged every one by our chief transgression. If a man drinks, he is known as a drunkard no matter if he is a banker, or a congressman, or a loving father and a good provider. If a woman talks, she is known as a gossip though she may be the leading spirit in all good works. The fact that we forget or forgive our own faults makes no difference, the label naming them is tacked onto our reputations like an April Fool placard on a man's back.

Lily had taken such a long rest from being the lady serpent of Berton that she doubtless supposed we were equally refreshed and absentminded. But the very sight of her set the whole church to seething and hissing speculations. Would she go back to the choir? Would she assemble the league? Some hoped so; some prayed fervently that she would show decent discretion and keep out of things.

She did not keep us long in suspense. She made for the choir on the next Sabbath day, as if it was like singing with John Henry in Paradise just to be back, though Lipton was sitting meekly with his wife four seats in the rear.

She was so glad to see everybody, and didn't we think she was looking better? In fact, she was fatally fresh and fair. And how she had longed for dear old Berton! One might have supposed she was the idol of our eyes, to hear her.

The first thing she did was to call a meeting of the league to elect a delegate to the National Suffrage Convention in Washington. Every one thought she was the one to be sent. But she'd been away so long she wished to stay quietly at home. Mrs. Warren, then! Charlotte was splendid, of course, she explained, but she wished to propose Mrs. John Henry Lipton. And Taggy, who was not there to defend herself, was elected.

"The impudent thing!" she cried when she heard of the honour. "I wouldn't leave this town while she's in it and John Henry keeps his singing voice, not even for Paradise, much less a Suffrage Convention!"

Meanwhile, we knew before Conference that Brother Battle would be moved. At the last quarterly meeting he frankly informed the board of stewards and the presiding elder that he was

not the man for the place, because of "peculiar conditions" which he found beyond his control as a pastor, and he asked for another appointment. Every man present knew the "peculiar conditions" to which he referred, and not one of them dared lift his voice against them.

Thus we had got down to where even a Methodist itinerant, who is the most long-suffering and patient of men, was anxious at any cost to get away from this church. There are other churches in the Conference, similarly afflicted, from which preachers pray: "Good Lord, deliver us!"

## CHAPTER V

ON MONDAY, November 23, 1914, the list of appointments for the Methodist preachers in the North Georgia Conference appeared in the morning paper. The first thing I saw as I ran my eye down the column was that Brother Battle, our pastor, had been sent to Camden. Then I found this at the bottom of the column, as if the Conference had barely remembered us at all: "Felix Wade, Berton Circuit."

I know the preachers of this Conference as a tired old Sister of Mercy knows her beads; but this was a new one. I had never heard of him, and I was troubled, fearing that we had got another theologue, just out of college. My anxieties were not relieved when Brother Battle returned to Berton the next day.

I went over to the parsonage at once to find out what I could about the new preacher. Brother Battle was very busy getting ready to leave on the evening train, Sister Battle having packed as usual on the sly.

He said he did not know Brother Wade, who had been transferred from another Conference. Yes; he was young. No; he did not look like a theo-

logue. Well, how did he look, then? He couldn't say; he was not good at describing people. No, Brother Wade did not ask him about the Berton Circuit, he answered, laughing when I pushed him for a few particulars. He knew nothing about him—not even whether he was married.

The next day after the Battles left, the Aid Society met at the parsonage.

Naturally we talked a good deal about the new preacher and his family. Mrs. Lipton said she hoped his wife would take some interest in the church, which was more than Mrs. Battle had done. Mrs. Parks said she knew they would have a baby—that they always did, even if it was a grandbaby; and she had sent her little Jimmy's high chair, which he had outgrown, to the parsonage that day. She said it made her feel bad to see the preacher's baby sitting on two volumes of Kitto's "Commentaries" in a chair at the table, and even then only showing his head and spoon over the top of it. She waved her hand at the high chair, which was in the hall. The arms were battered where little Jimmy had registered his spoon vows for two years. The paint had been kicked off the foot rest, and the top of the back was scarred where he had tried his early teeth on it.

We took a list of everything in the house, which is an investigation of character the preacher's wife

always faces after her back is turned. Mrs. Lipton discovered that a sheet was missing. The parsonage had four new sheets and one old sheet. Where was that old sheet? She'd like to know. We found it wrapped and sewed round the ironing board. This cleared Sister Battle from the suspicion of theft, but not from the charge of extravagance.

I do not know anything more pathetic than a parsonage after one preacher's family has moved out and before the next one comes in. It is so forlornly dingy inside, like an old nest used year after year. A sort of secondhand home; never quite fresh—the rugs faded; the shades hanging to springs that refuse to roll up or down; the china chipped; a little dab of scraps mixed with the dust in the garbage can, showing how frugal they were of the very crumbs from the table, and the last frantic effort of the pastor's wife not to leave any dust behind to accuse her.

We looked into all these things, as was our right and privilege. Then we planned what we could afford to do for the new preacher's family. We bought a doormat, a dishpan, and put in a new stovepipe. These purchases left only forty cents in the treasury of the Aid Society. We made a list of things we could spare for the pantry from our own stores. Mrs. Peters said she would give six

glasses of jelly, though she thought Sister Wade ought to return the glasses. She had contributed jelly last year and the moulds were not returned. Mrs. Sims would send two dozen eggs. Mrs. Lipton thought she could spare a pound of butter. Mrs. Warren would "see" that the stewards contributed the "staples," meaning flour, lard, sugar, and coffee. I've noticed that no one ever associates the thought of meat with a preacher's diet when we are stocking the pantry. I always make a cake and take it to the parsonage the day they come.

We decided not to wash the windows, because the weather was cold and because Mrs. Warren said she thought the preacher ought to wash his own windows. We went home, having done the best we could and believing we had three more days before the Wades came to get things ready for them.

I was in the kitchen Saturday morning mixing the cake when the telephone bell rang. I knew it must be Sally Parks, for I never faced a crucial moment in my domestic life, when the soup was about to boil over or when I had both hands in the biscuit dough, that she didn't call and keep me at the 'phone until the worst had happened.

"Is this you, Sister Thompson?" she began in quavering tones.

"Yes. How are you this morning?" I answered.

"I'm not very well. I feel strange and excited."

She always felt abnormal or subnormal; so I waited without spending my sympathy.

"Have you seen him?" she began again.

"Seen who?"

"The new preacher. He's come!"

"What's that?"

"I say Brother Wade's here; came in a car, with a servant and a bulldog."

"A servant and a bulldog! Where's his wife?"

"I reckon she'll be in later. They say he's got a houseful of children. Sister Lipton's just called to say that Sister Warren saw him pass her house. Said it looked to her as if he had a piano in the back of the car. She knew it was the preacher because Sister Peters called up directly and said they stopped at the parsonage."

I hung up the receiver without ceremony and hurried to the window. I always keep the curtains drawn so as to see in secret what is going on in public.

A high-powered gray car stood in front of the parsonage on the opposite side of the street. What I should call an extremely high-powered bulldog sat on the seat behind the windshield. And not another living creature was in sight. He was a white dog, laced up in brass-studded

harness. And he looked as if Nature had mashed him in the face. His nose pointed straight up. His lower lip sagged and showed his teeth. He had no ear at all on one side, and the other was only the remnant of an ear. His whole appearance was that of evil majesty. If ever I saw rank heresy in my life, it was that dog sitting in that car, which rumbled and snored like a rich man in his sleep, in front of our Methodist parsonage!

Before I could recover from my amazement a heathen came down the steps from the house, hurried to the car, and loaded himself with luggage, which he carried in.

Presently smoke shot up from one of the chimneys in long, snarled masses. I could hear doors banging, the thumps and thunders of a terrific adjustment going on, as if a strange and powerful presence was making room for himself in that small place. All this time that dog sat with his nose keened to the wind, his ragged ear laid flat, and his lower teeth showing, as if he wore a false plate that didn't fit.

I do not know how long I stood there, waiting for a glimpse of the preacher and craving to know what was going on in that parsonage, where I had known for nearly forty years everything that did transpire there.

The heathen skipped in and out through the

back door, nosed everything in the backyard, as if he couldn't find what ought to be there. It's one thing to take up missionary collections year in and year out for the salvation of the heathen, but it's another thing altogether to see him frisking round your parsonage as if he owned it. That Chinaman in the backyard didn't look any more in keeping with a Christian minister than the bulldog did in the front yard.

While I was considering this the figure of a man appeared at one of the windows. Never before have I longed for the sinful luxury of opera glasses! I could make out that he was tall and clean-shaved, but I could not distinguish his features. He appeared to be staring straight across the street at the window where I stood. No woman is willing to be judged by the eye with which she peeps, or the ear she flirts to a keyhole; so I drew the curtains together gently as a zephyr stirs them in summer weather and retired to the kitchen.

The competition between Taggy Lipton, Charlotte Warren, and myself, as to who shall make the acquaintance of the new preacher first, has always been strong and at times heated. If Mrs. Lipton wins she tells him all the bad news in the church, which members he can trust, and mentions, by description rather than by name, those

whom she considers stumbling-blocks or Pharisees or busybodies. If Mrs. Warren gets the first chance at him she tells him how to manage the church and lets him know the "awful mistakes" his predecessor made. But if I come in a neck ahead I tell him what a good people he has come to serve, how devoted we are to the preacher, ever ready to hold up his hands; leaving it with him to discover how difficult we are and how gifted with all human perversities.

Owing to the fact that my house is nearest the parsonage, and to the pardonable eagerness of my spirit to be up and doing, I am usually the first one to meet him.

My interest was quickened by what I had seen, and more particularly by what I had not seen. I was concerned to know what manner of man this was, come to preach the Gospel with a fine car, a bulldog, and a heathen for his personal attributes.

It is the custom here for the preacher to come first, while his wife makes a visit to her folks. I reflected that this was all the better reason to bestir myself in Brother Wade's behalf, and to go over at the earliest possible moment to see whether he was comfortable. Before the middle of the afternoon I fixed up a little, not too much, took the cake, and crossed the street to the parsonage.

The heathen opened the door. And, seeing the cake, I think he was for sending me back to the kitchen, but I knew my place; so I marched past him into the parlour.

"Tell Brother Wade Mrs. Thompson wishes to see him," I said, setting the cake on the centre table and turning upon him with Christian authority in my eye.

He bowed, strained out a sound that resembled a sniff or a grunt, or a word which had not yet grown into language, and disappeared.

I looked about me with the avid curiosity of a woman who is alone among somebody else's things.

The room was the same little dingy parlour with golden-oak furniture. Yet it was not the same. The sofa was drawn up in front of the fire, as if it meant to keep warm and enjoy itself. The chairs reared back, as if they might cross their legs presently. A gun leaned against the wall in one corner. Fishing rods, reels, and nets littered the floor. Kitto's "Commentaries on the Old and New Testaments," which have been the whole of the parsonage library for years, were packed into the bottom shelf of the bookcase. And the shelves above were glowing with volumes bound in as many colours as Joseph's coat.

This was no longer the place where children played before the fire; where a man in a rusty,

long-tailed coat tramped back and forth preparing his Sabbath sermon to the shrill music of these young voices. I missed the pastor's wife's workbasket. And—bless my soul—what had become of the pictures on the walls? The Aid Society spent three dollars for them—"The Martyr's Crown," "Clinging to the Cross," and a really splendid coloured print of Wycliffe being burned at the stake. They were not there.

Suddenly I saw something. A very large picture hung above the mantel. It inhabited the room, gave it a meaning and a majesty that were new and strange. The colours were subdued and very rich, like memories that blend and soften beneath the tone of time. The background beneath a distant sky was filled with the figures of men and women clad in New Testament clothes. They pressed forward with eager, listening faces. In the foreground stood Jesus, with a young man, who kneeled before him.

I recognized the scene portrayed as that of the "rich young ruler," who, having everything else, desired eternal life. It was all there in the picture —not the words, but the meaning. The majesty and terrible tenderness in the face of Jesus; the pride, wealth, and respectability of the world kneeling at His feet in the figure of this young man, who seemed already to have heard the

command: "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, . . . and come, and take up thy cross, and follow me." The face of the kneeling man bore that expression which is thus interpreted: "He went away grieved; for he had great possessions."

Never before have I seen such a picture in a Methodist parsonage. The men who live in them usually have had no great possessions; so they find it easy to follow the Prince of an invisible Kingdom.

I was standing in the middle of the room, trying to offset the impression of the other things scattered about, the meaning of the fishing tackle and the variegated library blooming above Kitto's "Commentaries," with the significance of this picture, when the door opened behind me and I stood in the presence of our new pastor.

He was tall; not spare, but slender. His brown, coarse hair was so thick it rolled opulently from the part. The bones of his face showed beneath the smooth tanned skin like a steel frame, delicate, and strong. He had the lips of a man, pleasing and wistful; but he had the clear, passionless blue eyes of a priest. His clothes, not clerical, fitted him with a kind of elegance. They belonged to him like a worldly charm, as if he had not chosen his tailor from among the brethren.

All this I saw in the first uplook I had at him over the top of my spectacles as he entered the room.

"Mrs. Thompson?" he said, advancing.

"Yes; and you are our new pastor?" I returned, forgetting to mention the cake or to ask him about his wife and children; in fact, forgetting everything, because he looked at me so hard—as if he had seen me before but could not remember where.

"It is good of you to drop in like this," he said, still holding my hand and leading me to a seat on the sofa in a manner that made me wish I had worn my best dress.

Then he drew his chair up, sat down, and bent a little forward to me, which somehow implied a compliment. I do not know whether he meant it for my Dorcas soul or for just the old woman who had come out in a blustering wind and a drizzling rain to welcome him; but I felt suddenly the faded femininity of my years flame, as if more of me had been recognized and revered than usual. I knew I had two red spots on my cheeks. The corners of his mouth deepened—merely two ends of a smile. And somehow I knew he had wished me those little faded pink roses among the wrinkles.

"I just thought I'd come right over and see if there is anything I can do to make you comfortable," I explained nervously.

"Well, you've done the only thing I needed. You came," he answered.

Preachers, as a rule, are offish to women. They will feed out of your hand and keep their distance at the same time. The Saint Paul in them never really trusts us. That is why I say, and have always said, that if a preacher gets into trouble with one the fault is more hers than his. I have noticed time and again that the pastors we have here prefer to sit more than two arms' lengths from the best female saint in this church, no matter how old she is in her virtues and Christian fortitude. Even Lily Triggs couldn't get near enough to sing out of the same book with Brother Worthen. Thus, I was not prepared for Brother Wade's easy manner. I was flustered.

"It's a habit," I said primly.

"To visit the preacher?"

"And his family; yes."

"Well, keep it up."

I shot a glance at him sidewise. His face was turned away, as if he had something on it not for me to see. But I saw something else—a cowlick on the crown of his head; a little place up there where the hair stood up, denying the order of things inside. In the days to come I recognized it as the place in this man where the boy of him still lived, impish, fantastic, and never quite conse-

crated. Sometimes, when he would be preaching and bent his head forward for emphasis, I could see the minister of God in front and that rebellious boy of him behind, with his hair tousled.

But now the only thing I understood was that there was something in the situation, which charmed and amused him, that was concealed from me.

We went on talking. I felt that I was being led away from the things I wished to say, and the things he ought to know about the church, to something else he preferred to know.

I have looked many a preacher through and through at a glance. I can tell the minute I lay eyes on one whether his Gospel will be meek or militant. But this was the first time I ever had one to look me through as if he knew me from my a-b-ab, to my nether transgressions. It was like having my spiritual pockets picked when I had come to deliver a welcome address and put him on his feet in the church. I felt a pardonable irritation; and I made up my mind to say what I'd come to say, if it was the last thing I ever did. I waited with repressed energy for the next pause in the conversation, which was so polite as to be almost secular. The moment it occurred I shot in:

"We are glad to have you with us this year, Brother Wade."

"Thank you. I am delighted with my appoint-

ment. Berton Circuit has quite a reputation in the Conference," he answered, smiling, but with such directness I knew some one had been tattling.

"Yes; but you mustn't be discouraged. This church needs——"

"How many inhabitants has Berton?" he interrupted.

"Fifteen hundred, counting the coloured people; about a thousand whites. The membership of our church——"

"How many churches?" cutting me off again; not rudely, but like a physician who sticks a fever thermometer in your mouth when you want to go on telling him how you feel.

"Three for the white people, not counting Olive-Vine," I answered.

"Why not count Olive-Vine?"

"It belongs to the Primitive Baptists, and——"

"Four churches," he went on, "for a thousand people! And what is the aggregate membership?"

I just folded my hands and looked at him. Did he think he was called to all of them? I was tempted to tell him he'd do well to fix his attention on the one congregation he'd been sent to serve; but I bore with him.

"The Methodists have two hundred members," I answered patiently; "more than the Presby-

terians and Baptists put together. But we hear that there are only twenty on the roll at Olive-Vine."

"What do these churches pay, all told, for missions, preachers' salaries—everything?"

"The Methodists lead, of course. Since Berton has been made a half station, with two services a month, we pay six hundred dollars a year, everything included, the Baptists nearly as much, and I hear the Presbyterians collect more; but that's because they have two or three rich members. Nobody knows what the pastor of Olive-Vine gets, but it's all the people give, because they don't believe in missions, or Sunday-schools, or anything but close communion, cold-water baptism——"

"And in Jesus, the Saviour of Men," he put in so quickly that I felt rebuffed.

"I begin to see how things are," he mused, not noticing that I had snatched off my spectacles and was looking at him with a strictly doctrinal stare. "Four churches, worth, say, thirty thousand dollars; four hundred members, contributing two thousand dollars for the support of the church, missions, and ministry. Probably one thousand more for repairs and incidentals. That's about five dollars a head, counting the women and children."

"But, Brother Wade, they don't. There are

many members who give nothing, and as many more who give almost nothing."

"That would probably bring the tax up to twenty dollars on an average for those who do pay."

"Tax! Tax!" I exclaimed, scandalized at the use of this secular word about the Lord's moneys.

"What about your school?" he asked, paying no attention to what I wanted to go on saying.

I told him we had a fine school, with three teachers.

"They should receive about three thousand dollars a year, at the very least," he mumbled to himself.

"They are thankful to get two thousand," I corrected. "The state doesn't pay its teachers very well, you know."

"And the people cannot if they are taxed three thousand for preachers and missions."

To hear him, one might think a bailiff took the Conference collection! My idea of a Methodist itinerant is that he should attend to his own business and keep out of all the other businesses round him. I was about to take a peck at Brother Wade, by telling him so for his own good, when he began again:

"Any places of amusement?"

"No, thank heaven! You will not have theatres or dance halls to contend with here."

"Well, we must do something about that."

"Don't you think of such a thing!" I exclaimed, deeply troubled.

"Well, I won't—now," he laughed.

I felt during the next few minutes, as we talked of any little thing, that he was smoothing my feathers; that he was aware of the vague anxieties in my mind. Though I was still troubled, I felt strangely soothed and confidential. And before I could fly up out of reach he looked at me as if he had just found me in an old hymn book and wanted to hear the tune.

"Tell me about yourself," he suggested gently.

"There's nothing to tell. I was born here; I've grown up and grown old in the church."

"Not in the world?"

"No; I've never seen much of the world," I began.

Then a queer thing happened to me. I looked up at him, this man with the eyes of a priest, and the mouth drawn across his face like a secret he kept, and the boyish cowlick on his head, giving him away. I was moved to tell him something I'd never confessed before, not even to William.

"But, Brother Wade, sometimes I've been tempted. I've wanted to see things no Christian woman ought to see, and to hear things—and to do things! I can't get over wishing, just wishing——"

With that, my mouth got the best of me and primped up so I couldn't get it down. I began to pat my foot, which is a nervous habit I have, and to pat my knee, which I always do when I pat my foot. But not another word could I get out.

"I know," he said kindly; "but you never did any of those things."

"Well, I couldn't, you see, here in Berton. There are so few sins a respectable woman could commit," I answered, laughing, because he threw back his head and laughed like a human being.

"And you've always stood by the pastor," he went on, grinning as if he accused me of that.

"If only you knew what I've endured holding up the hands of preachers!" I exclaimed, not realizing I was talking to one, until he laughed again.

"I can imagine that has been no easy job."

"Not a job. It was my duty," I corrected. "They've all been good men. But this is a poor charge; so we get the young ones before they know how and the old ones when they are about to quit. The young ones whoop and rant until they come down with the laryngitis, not realizing that the Gospel is a still small voice, and that they've got to save themselves to preach it for the next forty years.

"Or they do right in the wrong place, which always upsets the stewards or hurts the women's

feelings. Or they don't visit enough; or they preach heresy without knowing it's heresy. And the old ones—well, you know how it is. They've outgrown the ways of youth. They don't draw the young people, and they take the rest of us for granted, like an easy chair they drop into after a long, long journey. I don't blame 'em. But it's been hard on this church and I reckon it's been harder on them."

He sat silent, staring in the fire. I thought I'd discouraged him, so I added:

"But their wives have been a great help to them. It's years since we had a single man, which is a mercy. We used to get 'em so young and so poor they couldn't marry, and we had to look after 'em, even to see whether they kept their feet dry and took medicine when they had a bad cold."

He made no reply; just looked round at me as if I'd caught him with his head wet from going in swimming on the sly.

Then I got up to go, and caught sight of Jimmy Parks' little old high chair in the hall, which reminded me of his wife and children.

"When's Sister Wade coming?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered slowly, like a man breaking bad news, cutting his eye at me. "The fact is, I'm not married."

"Not married!" I fairly screamed. "Why, we

"'NOT MARRIED!' I FAIRLY SCREAMED. 'WHY, WE HEARD YOU HAD A WIFE AND—AND A HOUSEFUL OF CHILDREN'"

heard you had a wife and—and a houseful of children."

"Mistake!" he said, grinning.

"But we haven't had a bachelor preacher for twenty years! We've got a parsonage. That entitles us to a pastor with a wife."

All this came out indignantly, before I could stop, I was so taken aback.

"I'm sorry. But it may not be so bad as you fear. I'll do the best I can. If I get cold feet, or a sore throat, I'll know where to come for help," he answered, smiling.

By this time my mind was running back and forth so fast through the circuit, with this preacher who had no wife for a shield and buckler, that I forgot the cake. We were standing in the hall, both of us looking at that baby's high chair reared back against the wall.

Then he said something about the parsonage, which, if he hadn't been the pastor sent to us by the Conference, would have made me suspect he'd never been inside one before. Experience damages illusions faster than most people can mend them. It seemed to me that Brother Wade had wrapped that little house about him like a spiritual garment, not knowing yet how cold it is in winter or how hot in summer.

"I like it—living in this house," he concluded.

"It contains the Gospel of poverty and charity, the Scriptures of men and women who have denied themselves, little worn places on the rugs where children played. I'm sure it is full of prayers—odd, how you get an idea like that from just things sometimes, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is; very odd. . . . You'll find that the plumbing's bad," I added dryly as I went down the steps.

When I was halfway across the street I remembered something.

"Wait a minute, Brother Wade," I called, turning back and seeing him still standing in the doorway. "I just wanted to ask you one thing," I panted. "How do you pray the Lord's Prayer?"

"How do I pray the Lord's Prayer?" he asked, looking puzzled, as if he might not be able offhand to remember the prayer at all.

"Yes; do you say 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us,' or do you say 'Forgive us our debts?'"

"Oh, yes; of course"—relieved. "I say 'trespasses.' Why?"

"The Shanklins are all Episcopalians. They have no church here and they won't come to ours if the preacher says 'Forgive us our debts.' Those poor people were without the Gospel all last year because Brother Battle said 'debts.'"

"Ah, I see! Well, they are safe this year as trespassers, which means more against them than being debtors," he said, not laughing, but as if he was ready to accuse the whole Shanklin tribe of their deeper sins.

I was not sure, when I knelt to say my prayers that night, whether I should thank God for our new pastor or ask Him to have mercy on the Methodists in Berton. I was unsettled in my spirit, which is worse than being unsettled in your mind, when you've been sitting and singing your soul "away to everlasting bliss" for nearly forty years in a familiar place.

But I had not got so far as this in my devotion when the telephone bell rang.

It is wrong to make a woman angry when she's on her knees before the throne of grace; but I was too angry to go on, knowing Sally at the telephone was like the importunate widow. So I rose from my indignant knees and flounced into the cold hall.

"Is this you, Sister Thompson?" she cheeped in her snowbird voice.

"It's always me, Sally, when you ring this number," I answered irritably.

"Have you been over to the parsonage yet?"

"Yes."

"What kind of preacher did we get?"

"Methodist," I returned maliciously.

There was a pause as if I'd shot cold water on her through the 'phone.

"Of course he's a Methodist! I just wanted to know what you thought of him.

She began again primly, as if she didn't consider herself responsible for the rudeness of a woman who pretended to be a Christian, and she'd hang up the receiver then and there. But I knew she wouldn't; so I answered:

"It's not what I think of him or what anybody thinks that's going to count this year, Sally; but it's what he thinks."

"Oh, then he's a strong character. We need a strong man to pull this church up."

"We've got him."

"I reckon he was glad to see the high chair."

"I left him doting on it"—dryly.

"Sister Warren's going to send her last winter's coat over for Sister Wade as soon as she gets in."

"Tell her she'd better wait until she sees her."

"Why?" The tone was breathless with curiosity. I knew she awaited the answer, to fill in the lines of Sister Wade's figure.

"Because it might not fit," I answered evasively.

I could see Sally at the other end of the 'phone,

her hair skinned back, her eyes rolled up, trying to think of something else she wanted to know.

"Was that really his car?" came the next question.

"I didn't ask him."

"Sam says it can't be. He says if Brother Wade could afford a fine automobile like that the bishops would have given him a better appointment."

"You tell Sam Parks a Methodist steward ought to know better than to slander his bishop," I answered sharply.

"Oh, he didn't mean it that way," she sniffed. "Well, good-night! I do hope Brother Wade's the right man for this church"—in a last effort to draw my fire.

But I held to my reserve. I was in no mood to betray the preacher by gossiping about my visit. Besides, I never talk about a new pastor. It's like predicting the weather and then have it turn against you and make you a prophet without honour in your own church.

The next day was Sunday. Before time for services the rear seats in our church were filled with Baptists and Presbyterians. They always come in force to hear our new pastor preach his first sermon, and they always occupy the frigid

zone in this church, as if it agreed with them better spiritually.

The Methodists were spread out comfortably in the middle latitudes, with a sprinkling of the sterner, stronger saints in the amen corners. The front pews were empty, as if the body of the congregation shrank from the uncertainty of a new pastor. All the most promising young sinners in town were still standing outside on the pavement. Now and then one of them would sneak up the steps, look in and draw back. They were too meek in their transgressions to risk those front pews with a new preacher in the pulpit; for if he should prove to have a furnace soul and the sparks of his Gospel flew out they would have no protection in that exposed place.

The choir had assembled almost beyond the front, for they had no choice in this matter of places. We could see Sam Parks working his head this way, and that, trying to pull his Adam's apple up out of his collar, getting ready to sing bass. We could hear Oscar Fain snuffing and clearing his throat, getting ready to skin the tune with his tenor. Evalina Lipton and Lily Triggs sat a certain distance apart, as if neither wished her alto or her soprano to be too closely associated with the other. They coughed, looked straight ahead, with their velvet hats sticking up like

high notes put in sidewise. Susie King sat upon the stool and bent anxiously over the organ, studying the opening chords of

*Come ye that love the Lord*
*And let your joys be known.*

The clock, placed significantly on the wall opposite the pulpit, marked the time—five minutes after eleven; and no sign of the preacher! The people began to stir. Little suppressed sounds, words barely whispered ran softly sibilant through the house; watch cases snapped. Then we realized suddenly that there was a commotion outside. Instantly everybody's head seemed to be put on backward and every face was turned toward the door through which Felix Wade came, followed by all the young men and boys who had gathered before the church. They slipped into the front pews like young puppies when they approach forbidden places, walling their eyes, ears down, and tails drawn beseechingly low.

The service began at once and proceeded as usual. We stood and sang. We read the responses. We knelt and prayed. We sat up and sang again. All done with automatic precision while we kept our eyes on the preacher, speculating on what manner of man we had drawn for this year's spiritual conflicts.

It was not until he opened the Bible to read the morning lesson that we realized there had been no collection.

"He's forgotten to take the offering!" somebody whispered behind me.

The stewards exchanged glances, half rose from their seats as if they meant to get it anyhow. With all those Baptists and Presbyterians in the house, it was criminal negligence to omit the collection! I thought so myself.

But it was too late. The voice of a young man filled the house; not the sonorous pastoral tones to which we had long been accustomed, even in the youngest preachers, but the clear, deep tones of just a man, modulated by a kind of elegance.

"'And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.' . . . Amen!"

The last word was added after a perceptible pause.

Then he went back and read the second verse again:

"'For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.' . . . Part of the second chapter of First Corinthians."

He stood staring down at the open book before him. He waited so long that a strange fear seized me lest he should stop there, walk from the pulpit and leave the house, having delivered his message in this brief sentence.

At last he began to speak, with his eyes still upon the book, vaguely, like a man who dares not fully trust himself. I have known a convert to falter the same way the first time he is called on to lead in prayer. But if ever such a one does receive the new gift of his tongue he surpasses any elder saint in the power of prayer. So now it was with this young man before us. Presently he lifted his eyes as if they were the wings of his soul, suddenly set free.

I have heard many better sermons—just sermons, you understand—but never one that dealt with a certain Scripture as if it were the living thought of the man who was talking, and not the words of an apostle spoken two thousand years ago. There was no authority in his manner; no accusative searching of the people to brand their secret unfaithfulness with the hot iron of the Gos-

pel, which is a form of inquisition peculiar to preachers. He merely promised himself. He was determined to know nothing among us but Jesus Christ. He took this vow against all unrighteousness in himself, and in Berton, as if he were taking a pledge against strong drink instead of preaching a sermon. It was like that, his manner —one who has recently made a narrow escape and now looks fearfully down from a high but dangerous refuge. We were to be his home; but he would occupy only the table-lands where we performed our good deeds, which is a very small territory in this community.

Before he finished, the carnal mind—all the human narrowness of us—was bottled up and blockaded behind our better natures. And I must say some of those present were harder hit than if he'd come out in the open and fought their besetting sins with the most damaging curses of Isaiah. Men and women are so long accustomed to having their transgressions flung at them from the pulpit that they cease to worry over this; but to be quarantined into just their virtues was a new and embarrassing experience.

I don't know why it is, but I'm rather farsighted in church; and once or twice I couldn't resist cutting my eye round just to see how the sermon was "taking."

Some of the people sat reared back; some bent their heads as we do in a pouring rain. Mrs. Warren seemed to be holding herself down with her double chin. She wouldn't look at the preacher; and she couldn't look at anybody else, for she knew every one of us understood better than the preacher did that he was putting up a guard-rail with this sermon against the special privilege she enjoyed, like sanctification, of revealing to him those things in his people which had least to do with the religious thoroughfare of Jesus Christ in them. Mrs. Lipton was visibly aggrieved. Her nose stuck out, her mouth dropped, and her chin receded as if he had already accused her of gossiping, when she hadn't said a word—had not even met him! The stewards stared straight ahead, as much as to say: "He's making his bed. Let him lie on it if he can!"

I could not see the Baptists and Presbyterians, but I knew what thoughts were running about among them. They were doing to our backs what we usually did to our own backs. For Christian backbiting is one of the acid forms of piety in all churches. A preacher is swift and experienced in discovering every shortcoming and man-besetting sin among the people he has come to serve. If he gets to his new appointment as late as twenty-four hours before he conducts his first

service, he knows every backslidden man and every meddlesome female Pharisee in the congregation; because somebody tells him by way of insuring him against snares and pitfalls, such as calling on the wrong brother to lead in prayer or showing himself too friendly to the lady serpent in the choir. He begins his ministry laden with everybody's transgressions.

While I was considering Brother Wade bereaved of all human help in these matters—for this was exactly what his message meant—and wondering what on earth would happen if somebody didn't break through and tell him a few things for his own safety about the peculiar conditions in this church —especially the choir—he brought his sermon to an end and capped my anxieties by praying the closing prayer himself. This is a privilege Brother Warren has had in this church for a quarter of a century.

I went down on my knees as usual; but, by the grace of God, I can sometimes trust the other person to pray without following every word with my private approval; so now I peeped through the lattice of my fingers at old Tom Warren, sitting bolt upright, glaring as if he'd been insulted before the very throne of heaven. I doubt that any one followed the prayer. We were all secretly staring through our fingers or over the tops of hymn books

at what we could see of the preacher. We were mystified by this stranger within our gates, who looked like an emigrant from the world of wealth and fashion, who possessed the magnetism and grace of an accomplished public speaker, and who made pledges of himself to us from the Gospel according to Saint Paul.

As I came out of the church Sally Parks just looked at me and went on. Then the congregation streamed forth, all talking, but not about the sermon or the preacher. They went their different ways, in a hurry to get where it would be safe to talk.

At last came Felix Wade, walking swiftly with a long stride, his coat tails cleaving to his shapely legs as if they had been taught to do it.

"Good morning, Brother Wade," I said, offering my hand.

He took it, looking at me doubtfully; then, throwing up his other hand, he replied, ruffling his cowlick as if I was somehow connected with that in his mind. I thought maybe he had forgotten me, seeing so many strange faces and shaking hands with so many people as he did after the service. But I was wrong. He called my name at once.

"Oh, good morning, Sister Thompson. I wanted to see you about something. What was it?"— still rumpling his hair and covering me with eyes

that lied and twinkled admiringly, just to compliment an old woman.

"Maybe you were thinking you'd go home with me to dinner. I'm expecting you," I suggested diffidently, for I had heard Charlotte Warren say, as she came out, that he had refused all invitations.

"I am much obliged; but I have guests of my own, you see," he answered, wagging his head toward the parsonage, where perhaps a dozen young men were standing on the steps waiting for him—the same youths who had followed him into the church at the beginning of the service.

"Not for dinner?" I gasped.

"Yes"—smiling.

"Heaven preserve the man!" I cried. "Don't you know there are only nine plates and six knives and forks in that parsonage?"

"That's it!" he exclaimed. "I knew I needed your assistance most awfully. Will you lend me a few things? Lum tells me we are short in spoons, too."

"You are short in everything," I said, bustling at the thought of his predicament. "Send your heathen over for what he needs."

"Thanks! I knew I could depend upon you," he replied cheerfully.

"Brother Wade, that was a good sermon," I said, detaining him timidly.

"Not exactly a sermon," he answered, looking at me quickly.

"No; not exactly. You didn't leave yourself much margin."

"All I dare take," he answered gravely.

The days that followed were filled with such excitement as we have never had in Berton, not even during a heated political campaign. It was not that kind, but suppressed, eager, increasing like a dam of secret waters. All eyes were focussed upon the Methodist parsonage, and upon the man who occasionally issued forth from it to do strangely incredible things; or—what was still more incredible—who did not come forth when he was expected.

The stewards met as usual on the first night after prayer meeting to fix the pastor's salary for the coming year. In all our experience as supporters of the ministry, never before had the pastor been absent on this important occasion.

If he is young and timid, with only one or two children, he may sit back and say nothing while the board of stewards explains why the church may not be able to pay the preacher as much this year—certainly no more. Or if he has three or four children and a delicate wife, and is in debt on account of the expense of moving from one

side of the state to the other, he may stand up to them like a hungry prophet complaining at a continued diet of locusts and wild honey. He will explain why he cannot possibly live on what they paid the last preacher, and bargain until he gets the raise in salary he needs. But he is always there, looking like the lean Word in the face, waiting to find out whether he can afford to live or just starve through the year.

Brother Wade bowed himself out of the church that night and left the stewards high and dry, as if what they paid the preacher was a matter to be settled by their own consciences—not his.

The result was they did not settle it at all. We heard that they agreed to let the church pay "what it felt able to pay," thereby spreading the responsibility out thinner than it ought to have been spread.

The next thing we heard was that the telephone had been taken out of the parsonage.

"Thomas tried to get Brother Wade for an hour last night before he found out what was the matter," said Mrs. Warren at the Woman's Missionary Society meeting.

"Sam did, too," put in Sally Parks. "He wanted to tell him what the stewards had decided to do about the salary."

"You mean what they decided not to do," I coolly amended.

"I think the pastor owes it to his people to keep within speaking relation to them all the time, when it costs but a dollar and a half a month to do it!" Mrs. Lipton added after a pause, by way of avoiding the action of the stewards, which is always a tender subject.

"Maybe he doesn't want to be within speaking distance all the time," I said. "It's like being held by a wire night and day. I've been called from my knees in prayer to answer the telephone myself"—giving Sally Parks what was coming to her.

"Still, since he's a single man, and we can't be running in and out the way we've always done at the parsonage, I think he ought to have kept that telephone," Mrs. Warren insisted primly.

"Well, there's one consolation: Lily Triggs won't take up so much of his time discussing the church music over it!" Mrs. Lipton sniffed.

Then we fell to work on the heathens in the uttermost parts of the earth; for, being respectable God-fearing women, we do not discuss the director of our choir except where two or three are gathered together confidentially for that purpose—certainly not if Charlotte is present. But I had a picture in my mind of Lily Triggs sitting in her parlour,

with her hair skewed up on top of her head, her pinched-up flower-pink face turned sidewise, with the receiver to her ear and her red lips to the transmitter, shaking her sinfully small foot, waiting and waiting to say, "Is this you, Brother Wade?" in her sweetest singing voice. "This is Lily Triggs speaking. I thought you might want to give some directions about the hymns for next Sunday——" And so forth, and so on, for an hour, if she could have kept him that long.

The only private information the town had of him was that the heathen did his laundry, and that Brother Wade spent more for gasoline and spark plugs and inner tubes that first week than he did for food, lights, and postage. He did not mail a single letter, and not a single letter had come for him at the post-office. He had not even called for his mail. This was very strange. Everybody said so.

Meantime he acted like a man taking a much-needed holiday. Apparently he was serenely unconscious of the curiosity he excited. He knew nothing about the awful condition the church was in. He had no depressing information about the sins in us which he must overcome. He was the freest man in his walk and conversation we ever had in Berton, except Lem Brock, who died in his bed here a few years ago after reigning as the

bad man of the community, and commanding more respect for his dangerousness than anybody else ever got for behaving himself.

But before the end of the first month the pastor had been within intimate soul-speaking distance with every member of his church many times. It was the quickest work in the line of pastoral visiting we had ever known. Each day about three o'clock he'd flirt into his car. The bulldog would scramble in after him, and he was off. Sometimes, they say, he made as many as ten calls during the afternoon. He fairly took the breath out of Berton, sailing up one street and down the other, with that dog sitting beside him like the graven image of a doubtful association.

The moment he started, all the Methodist 'phones in town began to ring in swift succession. The women informed one another, and each one flew from the 'phone to pick up the children's playthings and maybe dust the family Bible. Then, before she could get her apron off and her hair smoothed, he'd be at the door. Or, worse still, he'd fly by the house and catch some woman, who didn't have any 'phone, in the backyard dyeing her last winter's suit, leaving those he skipped on the way to go through the same preparations for him the next day. Then, maybe when they'd given him up altogether and settled down reck-

lessly with the sewing machine in the parlour, he'd pop in.

"I didn't mind his catching me with my collar off, and little Jimmy in nothing but his shirt before I could get his pants on, so much as I did that awful dog he keeps in the car," Sally Parks complained. "A preacher should avoid the very appearance of evil, and that's the evilest-looking beast I ever saw in decent company."

The same afternoon, when I heard Brother Wade's car stop in front of the parsonage, I went out on the porch and beckoned to him. I can't tell how many times I've done that, called the preacher across the street between my house and his to tell him something he ought to know, to warn him against some mistake, or to spur him on to something. I've saved many a one from his own folly or somebody else's folly just in the nick of time.

He came, followed by the dog. I looked at him and then at this scandalous beast.

"Brother Wade," I said, coming straight to the point, "that's a terrible-looking dog."

"It's the way he's made," he answered, smiling.

"He looks bad—dangerous!" I insisted.

"He's as gentle as a lamb." He stooped to stroke the head of the animal.

"He was bred to fight."

"He never fights."

"Where's his other ear, then?" I demanded with just suspicion.

"Oh, that happened before—well, before we quit fighting," he replied with some embarrassment.

"Appearances are very strong against that dog, Brother Wade!"

"You might say the same about members of the church, Sister Thompson. I've seen a man sitting in the amen corner who bore all the marks of a doubtful and dangerous character upon his face," he returned significantly.

"When you do, don't trust him with the collections or with your confidence. Sitting high up in the church doesn't give a man a certificate of good character, and living in a parsonage doesn't change the nature of a bulldog," I answered, knowing exactly who I was talking about and not ashamed to do it. "Can't you exchange that animal for a kinder-looking dog?" I insisted after a pause.

"If I did he might go back to his old habits—and lose the other ear!" he laughed.

"Brother Wade, I'm compelled to tell it to you plain, then——" I began and hesitated.

"Well?"—coolly.

"I don't judge a man by the dog he keeps, but

a lot of people in this town will. They can't get used to the preacher driving up to their door to make a pastoral call with a brass-bound bulldog sitting beside him. It—it looks wrong!"

"Oh, if that's all, I'll leave him at home. Never occurred to me—this objection. Association of ideas, I suppose," he laughed.

"Yes"—feeling the bigot rising in me; "cards are associated with gambling, so we mustn't play cards. Dancing is associated with sin, so we mustn't dance. Some music is associated with wicked indulgence, so we mustn't sing it. And some dogs, Brother Wade, are associated with the cruelest sports, so——"

"Yes; I see. Bill," he said sternly, "you remain at home with Lum after this."

And he did. From that day he never went pastoral visiting with his master.

We had gone in by this time and were sitting before the fire. Brother Wade continued to regard me with a certain gentle curiosity.

"I'm just thinking. Ah, would you mind telling me: Is it so—that you never played cards?"

"Never!"

"Nor danced—not even when you were young?"

"No," I answered with a sigh.

"It's awful and it's beautiful to live like that——" he said, more to himself than to me.

"I don't deserve credit. I wanted to do both many a time."

"That's what makes it awful and beautiful—that you didn't."

"I doubt if those are the worst sins," I went on—"those natural desires for amusement and joy we have when we are young. I've had harder trials since I became a Christian. The spiritual force in us is like a gun that kicks sometimes——"

"Yes?" he asked, looking up as if he recognized something familiar.

"You'd hardly believe it," I went on saying, "but women are terribly bruised by their own souls. Our fault is that we want to know something all the time. We sit in our houses and wonder and wonder what's going on, because we never can find out, no matter how much we search and ask. It's wrong; it leads to all manner of evils you'd never suspect—in us good women, I mean."

"What does?"

"Curiosity. We can conquer everything but that. I've always suspected that Satan gossiped with Eve enough to make her crave to know more than she could find out before he offered her the fruit of knowledge. She was the first disciple of higher education. And——"

He interrupted me with a laugh so full of merri-

ment that I feared he might think I was being flippant about Genesis; so I went on quickly:

"But we didn't get it—knowledge; only an insatiable serpent curiosity. The hardest-won victories I've ever had as a Christian woman have been to keep the forked tongue out of my eyes and the hiss off my lips because I've found out something about somebody that I should not have known."

Afterward I wondered whether all the other women in the church were so ready to tell this man things about their own failings, since he would not permit the failings of others to be mentioned. It imparted an element of confidence and safety in the pastoral relation to know that Sally Parks would never be allowed to tell him that she considered me dictatorial in the missionary society and meddlesome in the church.

On Monday after the third Sunday Felix Wade disappeared from Berton. He was absent until the following Saturday. No one knew where he had gone or for what purpose. That question stared at him from the face of every man, woman, and child in Berton; but he offered no explanation.

Now, a preacher may be a "free man in Christ," as the Scriptures promise, but God Himself cannot make him free in the minds of his own people. They feel that he belongs literally to his church.

And naturally the members keep an eye upon him. When our pastor, before this time, left us even for a day we knew where he had gone—usually to a district meeting—and when he would return. We knew how much money he had in the bank; and if he had none we knew that, too. We knew where he spent his vacation, if he got one, and how much the suit of clothes he wore cost. So, when Brother Wade went off twice in the course of his first month, without telling anybody where he was going, we didn't know what to think or even what to suspect.

He always preached a good sermon the following Sunday, never forgot the collection again, and kept the open countenance of a guiltless man. Still, we wanted to know where he went. It was a breach of confidence not to know.

Whatever others may have suspected I was certain that he had never conducted a service or preached a sermon until he came to us. He had forgotten the collection that first Sunday, which is the last thing an experienced pastor would forget. And, though his discourse was spiritual to the point of asceticism, his choice of words never was made from a theological lexicon. His delivery was too politely, delicately restrained to suggest the abandon of a preacher flinging himself against Satan with the flaming sword of righteousness.

I have not listened to preachers for forty years without knowing a thing or two. It was what I didn't know that troubled me. And nobody knew the man himself—only his ministry, which was still too short to afford side lights upon his character. I had my suspicions that every member of the church was confiding in him. Also, they were awaiting a few personal confidences from him in return—which he blandly avoided giving.

This was queer, because preachers are usually very confidential. They tell everything, from the sins they used to have to the pains and aches and tribulations they have now, with merely the fervid hope of reward in the future.

Finally, while Brother Wade was off on his third disappearance, I thought of something so natural and proper that I wondered it hadn't occurred to me sooner. I wrote a letter to our presiding elder. I told him what a fine preacher Brother Wade was; how well he was taking hold of the young people in the community; how conscientious he was about his pastoral visiting—everything I could think of by way of recommending him. Then I added that we were so pleased with him we wanted to know how we happened to get him. How long had he been in the ministry? From what Conference had he been transferred? The reply came at once. It was brief.

DEAR SISTER THOMPSON:

Your letter is one of a dozen similar letters that have come to me from the members of Brother Wade's congregation. I am glad he is so well received. We hope he will do a great work in Berton and heal those dissensions in the church that have been a great affliction to the bishops and elders.

I am unable to answer your questions or those of the same general nature concerning him in the other letters. His case is remarkable in the fact that he came to us licensed to preach and highly recommended by the Bishop. This was sufficient assurance to the brethren who received him into our Conference. Accept him as from the Lord, and do what you can to uphold and strengthen his hands in the ministry.

Faithfully yours,

P. E. PATTLING.

I went back and read this sentence: "We hope he will do a great work in Berton and heal those dissensions in the church that have been a great affliction to the bishops and elders."

## CHAPTER VI

THERE is no possible way to divorce religion from secular life, and no way to reconcile the one with the other. Man is a mixed metaphor, an incorrect composition from the beginning. He is very busy squandering the patrimony of his spirit in the commerce of this present world. But when he grows sick of himself and all his works he turns to God. Then when he discovers the terrific demands the Almighty makes he draws back and swears he is the promoter of his own salvation. Of all the perversities in this world there are none like those which he practises trying to avoid the issue of his own soul. He will keep books in this business, credit himself with seven chosen virtues, two or three vices, strike off a margin for incidental sins—and do it all so privately that only the angels can distinguish him from a saint. He is just good enough to be endurable and just bad enough to be natural. But let a man determine to live literally according to the Sermon on the Mount, actually practise poverty, humility, meekness, mercy, purity, and peacemaking, and he becomes a menace to the com-

munity. He commits crimes against the standards of the best people.

So long as we are in the flesh we may only take the Beatitudes with moderation, or take the consequences, which in the experience of our church proved to be very bad. The reproach was not upon these Scriptures, but upon us here in Berton. But I will say this—if Felix Wade had remained pastor of this church long enough to enforce his sublimely impractical form of piety, the last one of us would have been naked, hungry, homeless to the point of starvation. I reckon he might have died a supernatural death, firm in the faith, but we should have been dead just the same, which was too much to ask of a thriving town and a struggling church.

My purpose is to set down here exactly what happened and to leave those who think they know that it could not have happened to prove what they think they know.

Berton is so far removed from the nearest large city where daily papers are published, that when the morning edition reaches us it is an afternoon paper, and when the afternoon edition reaches us it is the next morning's paper.

Now in the summer of 1914, before Felix Wade came to us in the autumn, the headlines of these

journals informed us that a great war was raging in Europe. This was all we knew about it. We were removed from the immediate sense of what was going on by the fifty years of memories and hardships which had elapsed since our own Civil War. To erase this date from the minds of Southern people would be like trying to remove the symbol A. D. from the history of Christianity. All our thoughts are divided simply and irrevocably between "before the war" and "after the war." So the news we had of battles in Europe only reminded the old men to tell again of the battle of Gettysburg. And the stories of sacked towns and cities in Belgium merely stirred the old women to tell of Sherman's march through Georgia, and how they boiled the dirt in their smokehouses to get salt with which to season food. No one supposed that a war waged on the other side of the world could affect us one way or the other.

It was a fact that the Stock Exchange in New York had closed. This was no affair of ours. Decent people in Berton did not approve of the goings on in this Stock Exchange, and never had. It was associated in our minds with gambling in cotton futures, a form of iniquity not practised here. Besides, New York was nearly as far from us as the war itself. The sun was still shining

upon fields of corn, and the hills about Berton were covered with cotton. Trade languished, but as trade always takes a midsummer siesta in this town no one was concerned about that. This stagnation was only temporary. The markets would recover when the crops began to move. The merchants said so, the farmers believed it, the professional men were only waiting for this annual migration of crops before they collected accounts. Even the stewards in our church promised to pay something on the preacher's salary—"when the crops began to move."

Then suddenly something happened and everything stopped. The crops were harvested, but they did not move. In November there were fifty thousand bales of cotton in Berton. The warehouses were filled, the freight depot was covered with it, the streets were lined with ragged bales of it, standing and leaning like poor folk ready to take the train. Then cotton went down to three cents a pound, and Berton was one vast Dives barn, filled with a great harvest while her people suffered for the very necessities of life. We could neither buy what we needed nor sell what we had.

The war in Europe had crossed the seas, travelled a thousand miles overland and reached Berton. Every man in the country, however poor,

paid an enormous war tax during the winter of 1914. And since no munitions factories had been established in this too temperamental part of the country, the South was not in a position, as the North and West were, to recoup itself financially for these losses by furnishing ammunition to the Allies upon strictly neutral terms.

One disaster followed another. First the Citizens' Bank of Berton closed automatically, as banks do in a panic, and John Henry Lipton, who was cashier, lost his job. Then the stocks in which Tom Warren had invested most of his money dropped way below par and ceased to pay dividends. Charlotte had to dismiss her servant and do her own work, which she did with such an air of outraged dignity that she was more formidable than ever. Molly Brown was obliged to sell her fifty-dollar organ for twelve dollars to pay her taxes.

"It's just as well," she said to me with a sigh. "I never could play a tune on it, but I took a worldly pride in having an organ in my parlour. Now there ain't a single thing left in my house that I don't actually need!"

The Peterses sold their horse and buggy for a little ready money to go on until Roger could sell his cotton. Sally Parks admitted that her family was living on the hard stock in Sam's grocery

store, which she said was very bad on account of the weevils in the lady peas and the oatmeal.

Now when our sons and daughters die, we can say with Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" But when it comes to the loss of wealth and comfort, we cannot lay that to Him, for the Lord never confers treasures upon us in this world and He never takes them away. We get them by hook or crook and our fellowmen do the taking away.

The panic struck Berton shortly after Brother Wade came to us. And we were so concerned about our own affairs that we ceased to speculate about him as we had done at first. I reckon we lost consciousness spiritually for a time. When we recovered from the shock we found him strangely cheerful, unaffected by the misfortunes of the community.

The same week the bank went into the hands of a receiver and Lipton lost his position, Tom Warren lost three thousand dollars in the failure of the Coal and Ice Company of Berton. Naturally the congregation in our church showed the effects of these disasters the following Sunday. Many men and some women wore that anxious look which the fear of spiritual damnation never inspires. We were all very low in our minds.

And it made us feel queer when Brother Wade opened the service with:

*Safely through another week,*
*God has brought us on our way;*
*Let us now a blessing seek,*
*Waiting in His courts to-day.*

I reckon we were still safe in the midst of these earthly misfortunes. But when you have lost your job, and maybe your deposit in the bank and half your property, it's not so easy to feel safe, much less to sing about it.

We did have a woman in this town once with this unnatural spiritual exaltation. She was filled with the Spirit. She said she could neither sin nor suffer, and she could rejoice in the face of any sorrow. Then her baby died. When we went to the funeral, expecting to offer sympathy to a heart-broken mother, she met us at the door with a smile and invited us into the parlour where the casket was. She showed how great her faith was, but it everlastingly ruined her in this town. Bearing her affliction that way seemed inhuman.

Brother Wade took as his text that day: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He said being poor in spirit meant literally preferring poverty, that poverty was the natural condition of Christians

in this world, that we must not want, but must want only to give whatever we had. This, he said, was the price of citizenship in heaven.

Neither the Warrens nor the Liptons were in heaven, and they showed it by the deaf-and-dumb faces they turned toward the pulpit that day. As we came out of the church Charlotte said to Sam Parks:

"There's such a thing as being wonderfully sustained by the grace of God when it's somebody else who's lost everything he's got in the world! When Brother Wade finds his own salary cut in half, and that he can get only 10 per cent. of his church collections, he will sing another tune!"

I thought as much myself. If he'd only said something sympathetic about the hardness of the times, we should have felt he was nearer kin to us. But never once during that dreadful winter did he refer to the distress in the town nor to any worldly condition. The moment we crossed the threshold of the church we were the Lord's ravens, His lilies of the field who should take no thought about how we should be fed nor wherewith we should be clothed. But when you are still in the body, which is very sensitive to cold and hunger, it is difficult to trust just to the wing feathers of faith in immortal life.

He preached steadily on the Beatitudes during

eight weeks of the worst financial depression we ever had in Berton. I am not complaining, you understand, but I have noticed that we Christians appreciate these Scriptures more when they do not apply so dangerously close to the fix we are in. Besides a pastor has the advantage when it comes to living up to the Beatitudes. What is the average man's religion is not only a pastor's religion but his business by which he earns a living. We were accustomed to sermons on these greatest of all sermons, but we accepted them before this time with reservations necessary for carrying on the carnal affairs of our little world. No other preacher ever took advantage of the situation to fit them to us literally. But Felix Wade would get into the pulpit every Sunday morning with that cowlick roached up on the back of his head, his face flushed with the blood of a man, and his eyes cooled as if the spirit in him looked down upon us with a merciless determination to squeeze us out of our bodies.

"Brethren," he said one Sunday, "the poor in heart do see God. This is not a figure of speech, but a law of the spiritual visions, exact as that governing refracted angles of light in this world. The merciful do obtain mercy. If there is one among you without mercy who has received love or charity or forgiveness, that man is a thief."

If he had swung his arm in a fine gesture, raised his voice and shouted, THAT MAN'S A THIEF! it wouldn't have been so bad. Some of the force of the thing would have passed off in the rhetorical explosion. But he never raised his voice, and he was too intimate with his "Thou art the man" forefinger, which he occasionally wagged at us in a manner not eloquent, but definite.

We were getting the Gospel, pure and undefiled, but I say it made me nervous, as we had fallen into the hands of one too young in spiritual life, not yet accustomed to making concessions to our dust and desires who was wielding a terrible sword of the spirit. I had forebodings, like the earlier Christians when they did not know for certain what fate awaited them, whether they were to be cast to the lions or burned at the stake. My impression was that we were about to be tried out according to our profession of faith, which is a dangerous experiment to make with men and women who must continue to live in a world governed by material standards.

I have never known any one who was really intimate with a Methodist preacher, though I've known many who thought they were. His migratory existence does not permit him to form lasting attachments. But I have noticed this, that every one of them chooses a favourite roosting

place on his circuit, some home where he can preen himself and rest from being just the physician of souls. My house has always been such a refuge, either because I am sure to be of the pastor's faction in the church or because I live so near the parsonage.

Brother Wade had the habit of dropping in on his way home at the end of a round of pastoral visits, or maybe he'd see me in the garden. It didn't matter, he came always informally. I would not call him a chicken-eating preacher, but he had a man's craving for food prepared by a woman. He was fond of a certain pudding I made. He'd follow his nose in sometimes when he smelled a particularly savoury odour in passing. Nothing would do but I must teach Lum to prepare some dish the way I served it. This was how that heathen got into my kitchen, a circumstance which led to startling consequences later on, as this record will show.

No man could be farther removed from his Gospel austerity than our pastor was on these occasions. He would not discuss church affairs or current events in the town. And, but for those mysterious excursions he made from time to time away from Berton, you might have supposed he had forgotten the world beyond these hills. I had an old plush-bound family album with silver clasps

which amused him as a picture book entertains a child. He'd turn the pages of this book, smile over the chignon headdress of the women and the ludicrously dignified faces of the men. He wanted to know who this one was and that one, encouraging me to become the Boswell biographer of these men and women, most of whom were dead and gone before he was born. Occasionally he would look up at me when I'd be chanting my tale about one of them. And I'd feel like an old spinnet tinkling a tune.

There was the picture of a child somewhere in the album, a little saucer-faced girl with colourless fair hair, wide eyes, and a turned-up nose.

"Do you remember her?" he asked mischievously the first time he saw it.

"Only vaguely," I answered, confused.

"Funny little smudge," eying me provocatively. "I suppose she was a good little thing!"

"I can't say, it's so long ago," I answered, smiling. "The chief thing I recall about her at that age was that she believed in a land where the clouds lived."

He closed the album, arose, and went to the window. The weather was very bad. Snow covered the ground, every bough and twig was limned with frost. The church across the way looked as if an old-fashioned white counterpane had been spread

over it with a fringe of icicles hanging from the eaves.

"We are in for a long freeze," I said presently, when he had returned to the fire.

"Madam," he began, ignoring the weather and addressing me in the exaggerated manner he often was pleased to affect, "may I ask you a delicate question?"

"What is it?" I asked, looking up from my knitting.

"When a saint is alone in her house, when the little girl is gone who believed in the land where the clouds live, and she has served a long, long sentence to just faith in the evidence of things unseen, what are her thoughts?"

"There are no such saints. When you are alone you are not a saint any more than you are a colonel, or—a doctor of divinity!" I answered.

"What then?" he demanded.

"Always just yourself, no spiritual airs, no worldly airs. If you've set yeast to rise, you watch it. If some one is in distress, you think of him, on a day like this, and of the birds in the snow. You are in and out of the spirit like a woman is in and out of her house, attending to the things outside as well as to prayers inside. If the Lord intended that we should live only in the spirit, He would not have made us so carefully in the flesh," I

concluded, looking at him significantly, for he had been preaching then on the Beatitudes for eight Sabbaths in succession. And the Sermon on the Mount differs from the Ten Commandments as a code of laws governing the spiritual life differs from one laid down for just the moral life in this present world.

What I hoped he'd understand was that the back of my soul was aching from so much Gospel stretching. But he evaded the issue.

"Go on," he said, smiling. "What were you about to tell me when you interrupted yourself?"

"It is nothing really to tell, but when one grows old there are things in the Scriptures which stand out and up as if they were looking at you," I admitted reluctantly, knowing that he was tempting my heavenly confidences as he often did.

"What, for example?" he asked.

"The messengers that the Lord sent," I confessed. "When I was young the angels who appeared to Abraham and to Jacob and to the others, you know, they belonged back there, like the rod with which Moses smote the rock. But now, when all the prophecies of my years have been fulfilled, when there is no one to come, when I am old and alone in my house—it's foolish, but I'm always expecting a messenger—not the terrible one who cries: 'Behold, I stand at the door!' but a little

old daily bread messenger of His loving kindness."

"I understand," he answered gently.

"It's just a feeling," I went on, "and the queer part is that long ago I saw the pictures of one of those angels. Wings and flaming sword he had, but, dear me, his legs were so thin, and he wore striped stockings!"

He threw back his head and shouted with laughter.

"So, I'm always expecting one like that, with striped stockings. Isn't it awful?"

"It's delightful!" he cried.

What I am trying to tell is that though this man preached the word in a manner to shrive us of our very flesh, he was himself as simple and kind as if he'd chosen himself to be a child in all things. But the moment you trod upon his Gospel grounds he was not the same. You felt the Cross in him, a fanatical negation of life. He was a sort of highwayman of the spirit, bent upon robbing us of the things of time and sense.

"Brother Wade," I said one day, "your sermons on the Beatitudes are very strong."

He did not reply, merely fixed his eye upon me and waited for what he must have felt was coming.

"But," I went on lamely, "they are designed to be more gradual in their effects, to develop spiritual

standards in nations through ages; not—not all at once and now."

"Why not for each individual man and now?" he objected quickly.

"Because for one man or one set of men to live literally like that would tempt too many others to take advantage of—well, of their Christian helplessness."

"What has that to do with the issue? One must be willing to lose the whole world," he returned obstinately.

"Willing or not, it comes to the same thing. We can't do it. The world's here. And we are in it. Not even faith can remove us from it."

"If I believed that, I'd surrender my credentials to-morrow," he answered, turning away.

The next day was Sunday and the storm broke, of which it seemed I alone had been the weather prophet, for the amazement upon the faces of the congregation as Felix Wade unfolded his plan was complete and far from Christian.

He read the story of the rich young ruler, and he took as his text the advice of Jesus to that young man: "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor . . . take up thy cross, and follow me!"

It was a soft morning in the early spring. The fragrance of the warming earth and of secret flowers filled the air. Through the windows we

could see the pale green mist of tender leaves swinging like a veil from every shrub and tree.

No one listened very attentively. The people were relaxed, drowsy with the sweet somnambulance of spring. We supposed Brother Wade was about to deliver the annual missionary sermon required of every Methodist itinerant. At the close of the service we expected him to take up the foreign missionary collection, which is usually done at this season.

I have heard so many missionary sermons myself that I feel I can do my duty and pay what I ought to pay to the cause without taxing myself to listen very closely to what the preacher says, just as I sometimes leave him to lead the prayer without following that very carefully. I caught a sentence here and there because he was an abrupt speaker who sometimes shocked the very sleepers in the church with a dash of cold-water Gospel. I recalled afterward that he said in the beginning of his discourse something like this: "We have never proved the existence of Almighty God, because we have never lived by faith. We only profess to believe. We actually live as if there was no Providence. This is as true of the Christian churches as it is of the unchristian world. The way to prove the omnipotence and fatherhood of God is to try Him out by the Word. If we do not then receive

the evidences of salvation, the joy and peace of the saints, then there is no God."

Well, I wished he had not said that, but I comforted myself that no one appeared to be listening, and that every member had already made up his mind what he would or would not give to foreign missions anyhow. So I settled down until he should finish with the missionary journeys of Paul, which are always the major part of every preacher's appeal for missions. It was not until later that I remembered the emphasis with which he dwelt upon the fact that Paul's chief purpose was to win converts to the Christian faith. Naturally this would be the object of a Christian missionary. But as he went on about Paul it seemed to me that he was poking at him, as if he merely forgave this great disciple for doing no better, because the times were hard and men had not yet a clear vision of Christianity. He called the Crusaders the second great missionary movement: "Still, brethren, to win converts to their faith, even by force of arms," he concluded. "But proselyting is not really characteristic of the spirit of Christ. To love and to serve every man, to give all you have and to follow with the cross of Christ, this is the purpose of missions. Mere preaching does not and never will prove the Christian faith."

I looked round to see if any one had noticed that he accused Paul of proselyting. But Sam Parks was obviously asleep and Tom Warren was nodding. The women didn't count. They can be sound asleep mentally while they stare like patient saints into the very face of the preacher.

"Now, brethren," he went on in his coldly modulated voice, "we are in the midst of the third great missionary movement.

"At the present moment there is a double line of fire and death stretched across the face of Europe. Six million men are fighting six million men. The tribal atrocities of the Middle Ages have been reduced to the exact modern science of the most deadly warfare. All the resources and wealth of these nations are being taxed to expose as many men as possible to death. They are perishing by the thousands every day, of such wounds and tortures as were never made by scalping savages. These unhappy men are more truly the victims of their own governments than they are of the enemy. We have but one explanation of this horror, brethren, that the nations engaged in this conflict are not Christian nations. They do not believe and never have believed in the teachings of Christ.

"It is not my purpose to discuss this reversion to type. Civilization never converted a savage

into a Christian. On the contrary, it may enhance his ferocity and his capacity to achieve every crime without breaking a single law, as is now proved by this wave of arson and murder sweeping over the old world. But my purpose is to call your attention to the miracle of Christian missions in our own country, still the land of peace and ideals.

"During the past six months more American missionaries have gone to the war zone than the Christian churches have sent out in fifty years. More money has been spent in this work than our foreign-mission funds amount to in ten years —nearly eighteen million, not counting private charities and gifts. Every one of these missionaries is exposed to greater dangers than Paul encountered even in the prison at Rome. They have died as bravely as Paul died. They have suffered as the early martyrs suffered, and with no less courage.

"Brethren," he cried, lifting his voice in passionate eloquence, "these missionaries were not sent by the Christian churches of this country. The moneys they have spent in the relief of the suffering, wounds, and poverty was not furnished by Christian denominations! And they have not gone to win converts or to impose their creed upon other men, but literally to succour, to give all they

have and themselves even to death, that they may show mercy and love and become the strength of the weak and the refuge of the destitute. For the first time the spiritual forces in a nation at large have proved superior to the spiritual forces of mere churches. Before this time we knew there were many Christians in this nation; now we know that this is literally a Christian nation, supporting many churches!"

Sam Parks sat up, snorted, and looked round as if he'd heard a clap of thunder and wondered where the cloud was. Everybody moved a little. The people were like leaves suddenly shaken by a wind on a summer day. What was the matter? Something was wrong. We smelled the brimstone odour of heresy—or was it heresy?

"Brethren," Felix Wade went on, after a pause during which he regarded us steadily, "the churches are still taking collections this year for missions in China, Africa, and Japan, to win converts for the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. But has this church as a church—has any church in Berton—given one dollar this year to the Red Cross missionaries on the battlefields of Europe? The Christian organizations in this town represent denominations whose properties, all told, are worth millions of dollars. Our own Methodist people are at the present time building a million-

dollar church and a six or seven million dollar university, while a million women and children in Belgium and Poland and France are without food. We are, like Dives, forgetting Lazarus at the gate, preparing to build yet greater churches!

"Let no man among you excuse his fault in this matter!" he said, lowering his voice and sweeping a gesture over us like a sickle reaping tares. "If you say these are not Christian missionaries, but merely humanitarians gone with no other motive to the war zone, you condemn yourselves, for Christianity is humanitarianism. As Cadmus introduced letters into Greece, so did Jesus Christ introduce the sense of love, sacrifice, and mercy into the experience of mankind. He was the great Humanitarian. Do you think it mattered to Him whether we joined converts to our church? No, by the living God! No! He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Nothing else. A Hindu who practises chastity, honesty, sacrifice, love, and mercy is no less a Christian than a Methodist bishop!"

Well, it was awful, but he still had us by the hair of the head, and we were not in a position to cry out.

"Are we to have no part as a church in the greatest, most truly Christian missionary work ever performed in the world?" he went on. "I

cannot believe it, my brethren. If a man is dying at your door, why step over his body to mail a contribution to a mission in China? It is my privilege to remind you of your duty. 'Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor . . . take up thy cross, and follow me.' There is no other way, brethren, not in this great emergency, even to keep the peace of this nation. We must be blameless. Therefore, I put the question to you straight. Whom will you have from this church to work in the American missions upon the battlefields of Europe?"

He asked that as simply as if he had said: "Whom will you elect as delegate to the District Conference?"

"The members of this church can easily afford a thousand dollars toward the support of this missionary without selling all they have. What we wish to know now is—who will go?"

The congregation could not have been more astonished if this church had been a soulless corporation asked to send a missionary to China. It was not that we were soulless, but the only thing that protects the disciples of any religion is their creed and their traditions. Otherwise we must literally follow the spirit which takes no account of the needs and demands of material life. Therefore, we were disturbed, almost visibly

indignant, at this demand, which was foreign to our methods. Also it was radical. There was no provision in the Discipline of our church for what Brother Wade proposed. The governing powers control the income from every charge as rigidly as if they were rents collected. Besides, we had our missions established in heathen lands for the purposes of converting the people to Christianity. What could we do? Six assessments besides the pastor's salary are laid upon every Methodist church. Well, it was unthinkable, this proposition to raise a thousand dollars extra for work in the war zone!

Sally Parks leaned over and whispered: "Is he crazy?"

"No, he isn't accustomed to being a Christian, so he thinks he ought to be one," I whispered back, determined to defend his divine foolishness if I could.

"What'd you say?" gasped Sally, who never can take a thing until it's made very plain to her.

"I say, Felix Wade must have been licensed to preach as soon as he was converted. I've always felt that there was something terribly newborn to God in him. He doesn't know anything about the government of the church."

Sally drew back and looked at me. She hopes

and believes I'm a good Christian, but she thinks I'm erratic and at times viperish.

We could hear furiously sibilant comments from the people behind us.

"He hasn't even taken the regular assessments yet!"

"A thousand dollars! When we've been robbed this whole winter on account of this war. He won't get ten cents!"

"And who does he think will go? Nobody!"

"I told you when he came with an automobile, a Chinese servant, and a bulldog that something was wrong!"

"What is wrong? What's the matter with him?"

"Crazy, that's what. Wandered off!"

This was followed by a suppressed titter.

All this time Felix Wade stood leaning upon the pulpit, his arms folded, with his eyes covering us like spiritual revolvers. The whispering died away. The tension was awful, especially as not one of us expected a response to his appeal.

Molly Brown was at her wit's ends. If she could have gone to the altar as usual and settled it that way! But the thing demanded was not in her line. Charlotte braced herself, reared back, and looked as if heaven and earth could not move her. Tom Warren was chewing very fast, his

white beard wagging and his eyes darting dollar-marked indignation in every direction.

Then we heard some one stumble into the aisle far back in the church. When something is about to happen of which you do not approve and against which you are not in position to protest, it is best to keep your eyes upon vacancy and let it happen. So we did. No one turned his head; every eye was riveted upon nothing.

Doctor Edd appeared, walking wearily as if it was a day's journey from the publican bench to the altar. As he drew nearer he seemed to shrink pierced now from behind by so many eyes.

"Brother Wade," he said in a low voice, "if no one else will go I'd like to. I've longed for this chance since the war began. But," he added, looking up frankly, "I'm not fit."

"The hour makes the man. This is your hour, Doctor," said Brother Wade. Then addressing the congregation, he added: "Brethren, we are very fortunate in securing the doctor for this service."

He went on to say that he hoped the necessary funds would be subscribed at once. He would not take a public collection, but leave it to each member's conscience to give what he could. The Methodists buzzed like a swarm of angry bees during the days that followed. The stewards of the church were disgusted. If Wade attended to

his business and to the collection of the regular assessments, he'd show some sense.

I held my peace, which was not peace at all, and said nothing. But the more I thought of the way our pastor had belittled the missionary work of the church in foreign lands, the more I thought about getting converts, the significance implied, the madder I was. If he'd only used common sense he'd have known that we couldn't get the money, and that Doctor Edd was a good sinner but not to be trusted upon a mission like this. But Felix Wade did not know a human thing about us. That was his limitation. He had stuck to his promise to know nothing among us save Jesus Christ and Him crucified—which was the same thing as being hopelessly ignorant of our essential attributes for living in Berton.

Well, I stood the strain as long as I could. Then I made up my mind to have it out with him and tell him a few things. This time I would not allow him to wheedle the own tongue out of my head to tell what he wanted to hear. I'd say what I had to say, if it was the last talking I did in this world.

This was Thursday afternoon. I was on my way to the Woman's Missionary meeting. I tied my bonnet on tighter than usual and sailed first across the street to the parsonage.

"Come in!" Brother Wade called cheerfully, hurrying down the steps the way he always does, to conduct me up them.

"No," I said grimly, "I've got something to say and I'm going to begin now."

He looked at me mildly, as much as to say: "Dear lady, you are winded already, better sit down!" But I would not. I planted my fore feet, so to speak, and turned the heels of my indignation full upon him.

"Brother Wade, I've been thinking of what you said Sunday about our missionary work."

"Yes," he assented, as if that was what I should have been doing.

"And I just want to say that the Methodist Church is not to blame for not having missions and missionaries in Germany and France and England. Until this war began there was a general impression to the effect that these were Christian nations." When I get started I can talk very fast, and I did now, smacking my fist on my palms for emphasis. "For nearly a hundred years we've been sending salvation to the heathens, and a hundred years after this war's ended we'll be doing that."

"Yes, yes," he agreed soothingly as he led me up the steps in spite of my wishing to hold back. "But what's the matter?"

"I was helping to pay the expenses of a Bible

woman in Siam before you were born!" I gasped as we reached the top.

"Oh, not so long ago as that!" he objected mischievously as he literally landed me in a chair.

"This church has always stood for missions, and it doesn't become our pastor to reproach us because we are not prepared to take care of Christian folk who should know better than to murder one another," I concluded with something very near a sob.

"The church of God must always be prepared, at least in the spirit, to serve and to pity and to forgive," he said, looking at me gravely.

"Well, don't we do that? For forty years I've pinched and saved and given to the church. Most of us have made sacrifices for the work!" I cried indignantly.

"Yes, I am sure of it. But there is no end to these demands. We must sacrifice all, if necessary, give all, if necessary," he answered.

"And who, then, will care for us, feed and clothe us?" I demanded.

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head!" he repeated slowly.

Well, you can't answer that. So I just sat there feeling the tears upon my cheeks, knowing that

something was wrong, not able to tell exactly what was wrong.

"Brother Wade," I began with an effort, "I'm an old woman. I have no possible way of earning my own livelihood. My income amounts to less than three hundred dollars a year. I pay fifty dollars of that to the church. But I've always stood by the pastor."

"Yes?" He made it a question as he watched me untying the corner of my handkerchief.

"Here's twenty-five cents toward that Red Cross fund."

He took it and looked up at me with scandalous wit, as if he'd won a bet which I'd just paid.

"You are as likely to raise a thousand dollars out of this church as Doctor Edd is to remain sober," I said, half crying.

He went on turning over my little slick quarter in his hand and grinning at it.

"I'm greatly encouraged," he answered after a pause. "Practically all the money has been raised."

"What's that?" I gasped.

"I say we have the thousand dollars, and the doctor is still sober!"

You could have knocked me down with a feather I was so astonished. Then I thought of something—that others had been more generous, that

my contribution must look very mean and stingy in comparison. The children of God do have their little vanities, too. I fished up another quarter from my pocket and offered it to him as I arose.

"Maybe I ought to give more, since others have given so much," I said tearfully, "but—I haven't the faith to do it!"

I went down the steps feeling very poor, not because I had so little but because I dared give so little. He accompanied me to the gate, regarding me from beneath his brows with a smile half troubled, half tender.

The next Sunday he took the breath out of the congregation by announcing at the close of the service that the money for the Red Cross work of our church had been paid, and that Doctor Edd was already on his way to New York, from which port he would sail for France.

Everybody looked at his neighbour with this question in his eye: "How much did you give?" But no one appeared to be willing to let his right hand know what his left had done in this business. As for me, I'd given so little that I told Sally, feeling it was not proper to take more credit than was due.

For some indefinable reason the church's worldly confidence in Brother Wade was not strengthened by this performance. The members

stood in awe of him. But no fault could be found with him. He attended to his pastoral duties as if they were not duties at all, but the natural expression of his interest and good will.

One circumstance afforded much secret satisfaction to some of us. This was his attitude to Lily Triggs. Later, when the question arose, no one could remember introducing him to her when he first came to us. We did recall the fact that she had not gone up on this occasion in her usual amiable angel manner to welcome him. Before long it was apparent that she was actually trying to get out of the choir. She was frequently absent.

Sally said she didn't think Lily was well, she had lost interest in everything. And the Suffrage League was on its last legs.

"As for the choir," she added, "I think the reason she neglects that is on account of Brother Wade."

"What's he done?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing. But you know he's queer. Lily told Charlotte that he didn't appeal to her. She says he's so antipathetic she simply can't sing. Musical temperament, I suppose."

"I doubt that."

"What can be the matter then?" she asked.

"I don't know, but Lily's not the woman to have her singing voice quenched and her light put out by a handsome young man with the manners of a

knight and the soul of a priest. She'd never be able to resist that combination, unless there was a more definite trouble than the squirming of her musical temperament."

"Mary, your suspicions of that poor girl are unworthy of you!" she chided.

"I know it, and the Lord will remember it against Lily that she fired the mind of an old woman with suspicions unworthy of a Christian," I answered shamelessly.

We had in March of this year a heated municipal campaign conducted with much animus in favour of a more economical government, and upon the demand that statements of the town's expenses and balances should be published monthly. The citizens were taxed to the limit allowed by the laws of this state, but no one knew what became of the money, and so on, and so forth. It was the usual thing—one set of politicians trying to put another set out of office. But it was a popular cause. The Baptist and Presbyterian ministers were high up in the Good Government League, and Tom Warren was running on the reform ticket for mayor. Naturally the Methodists expected the pastor to "take a stand." Every Sunday we listened in vain for a sermon on the duties of Christian citizenship. Finally a committee called on him and asked for his support.

"As a Christian minister we feel that you should let Berton know how you stand in this fight, Brother Wade," said Sam Parks, who was the spokesman.

"When I became a Christian minister, Brother Parks, I withdrew from the business world to engage exclusively in the business of preaching the Gospel and living accordingly. That requires all my strength, time, and courage. Besides, this town is a corporation like any other. Every citizen in it is a stockholder. If a corporation mismanages its affairs, that is a secular matter in which the church of God should have no part. I am not here to accuse one man or to recommend another, but to keep ever before you the Son of Man, that you may follow Him and forsake all strife, every wordly thought or interest which conflicts with His teachings."

"But you are in favour of law and order and honest government?" persisted Sam.

"So is every man in Berton," he laughed. "You are only one party of men accusing another party of men. I will admit something, Brother Parks, which I never meant should be known here," he went on after a pause. "Before I became what I am I was for years interested in political matters. So long as I am a Christian minister I shall not be a politician nor take part in these issues. This

is not a criticism upon those who do. I merely say that one must choose either the one or the other. You can't be a preacher and fight the members of your own church in a political campaign."

This was the first reference Brother Wade had made to his past life. He consistently evaded giving further information about that. While the other preachers in Berton shouted anathemas from their pulpits against graft and exhorted the brethren to vote the reform ticket, he "availed himself of the opportunity" to preach from this text: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

The quality of the man always determines the quality of his virtues and faith and even the use he makes of them. Religion makes some people presumptuous, ill-bred, unspeakably offensive. They use their virtues to insult others. Their piety is the fire they kindle beneath other men's reputations. They have the instinct of spiritual bounders, and God will undoubtedly keep an Ellis Island quarantine in some part of the floating heavens for such saints. I reckon one reason Christianity is not universal in its appeal is due as much to this as to the obvious hypocrisies of those who sometimes make great professions.

Some people vulgarize the nature of the Al-

mighty by claiming kin with Him. Felix Wade was not one of these. He was informed with the grace of goodness. He made a fine and delicate art of living uprightly. He was like a man with such a splendid ancestry he never had to mention his family connections. You must be gross enough yourself to corner him in order to force him to admit his personal relations to Providence. He never told of his own spiritual struggles, never gave his "experience." He simply walked among us living the Word, wearing the Faith as if it was the dress suit of his salvation. Sally Parks said once that Brother Wade was so nice and polite and reserved about his goodness she hated for him to know about our sins in Berton, they were such common, snub-nosed transgressions. Sally is a very dull woman, but she can feel her way to saying a thing like that when smarter folks miss the point.

The trouble with him was that he either could not or would not reach into the normal life of the community. He was for placing the Holy Grail into every man's hands. And you cannot do it. The church recoiled from the literal demands he made spiritually upon the members. The people defended themselves from him by indifference. But we might have got safely through the year as a dead church if he had not stirred up a hornet's

nest among the very elect. I refer to those in whom much local authority in the church is vested.

Early in April the public-school building of Berton was burned. Three hundred students were turned into the streets in the middle of the spring term. It was a great misfortune, especially since Berton is the educational centre for a large section. The following Sunday Brother Wade added an educational postscript to his sermon.

He referred to the burning of the school. Something must be done at once. He supposed it was every man's business to help in this crisis. He desired, therefore, to lay a plan before the congregation by which the school term might be finished, and which he had no doubt would meet the approval of every Christian man and woman present.

"Brethren," he went on, referring to a slip of notes which he held in his hand, "there are four churches in this town. These buildings are worth at least sixty thousand dollars. They are only in use a part of Sunday each week. The remaining six days they are closed. They serve no purpose. This is an enormous waste of the church's property. In no other business do we practise such poor economy.

"They should be open every day. And the

business of salvation should go on in them every day. Education is essential to salvation, as ignorance is the enemy of righteousness. You have in Berton enough churches to house all the departments of a university, to say nothing of a high school. My proposition, brethren, is to offer this church to the trustess of the Berton High School. Doubtless the authorities of other denominations will be glad to lend their churches also."

I do not know of anything so dangerous to accepted Christian traditions as the actual Christianity which we profess. Nothing else enrages us so much as to have our idolatries disturbed and exposed to our own gaze.

What Brother Wade had said was the literal truth. There is scarcely a town of fifteen hundred inhabitants in Georgia which has not enough empty churches in it to serve all the purposes of higher education. Yet it is the custom to burden the people with bonds and enormous taxes to get schools built, because to use the church for this purpose is unthinkable. I do not know why, unless we feel, without exactly thinking it, that we leave the Lord in His house when we close it on Sunday evenings and desire that He shall not be disturbed until we come again to Him on the next Sabbath.

There was a moment of scandalized silence measured by one long exchange of glances between our pastor and his congregation, when he finished what he had to say and stood waiting for whatever might happen. Then Tom Warren stood up. He was so mad that one almost expected his beard to catch fire.

"Brother Wade, this is the house of God!" he began indignantly. "It was built for worship. So long as I am one of the trustees appointed by our Conference it shall never be profaned!"

"How profaned?" asked Brother Wade.

"I don't know what you call profanity, but to the folks that built this house it would be a sacrilege to have a hundred children messing in here, running in and out of the pulpit, cutting their names on these sacred benches, and eating their victuals on the altar!"

"It's all in the point of view, my brother," Brother Wade answered mildly. "To me it seems far more profane for a man to hate his brethren in this house. The noise a child makes is no more than the song of a sparrow under the eaves. The marks he leaves, they may be seen and cleared away, but who can defend himself against the secret thoughts of another?"

Well, I can't tell it the way they went on—Felix Wade in the pulpit, the three trustees and

the stewards hopping up and down in the pews like popcorn on a hot griddle. They were all against him. And they said so with a vehemence never seen before among Christian brethren in that place.

The women kept silent—that is to say, we only whispered the one to the other. We are forbidden to speak in the Methodist Church except to give our Christian experience or to shout. A woman cannot even read the missionary report of her society in our Quarterly Conference. She can hold no office in the church. In communities where there is not a single Christian man to be Sunday-school superintendent they will do without a Sunday-school rather than allow a woman to take the place. The Methodists are rigidly literal in their interpretations of Paul's command that the women should "keep silence in the churches." We are allowed on some of the executive boards and we are exhorted to do most of the work for missions, but the house of God is made a sort of reproach to us, a place where we must feel our unworthiness to man. I'm not complaining, you understand, I'm just telling the truth. And if some of the women I know ever meet Paul in Paradise, he will be called on to explain what he had against us or take to his wings.

We sat there listening to Sam Parks tell of the

awful danger in secularizing the church by allowing the children to say their lessons in it until I couldn't stand it.

"Sally," I whispered, "one might think Brother Wade was trying to change this church into a theatre the way Sam's carrying on."

She's fond of Sam and will hide her own convictions like a good wife to stand by him. So she made no reply, and sat beside me, holding in to keep me from knowing she agreed with me. But I went on:

"If this church is more sacred to these stewards than the welfare of their children, why don't they say so in the plain terms of idolatry and have done with it!"

"Don't talk so loud!" continued Sally.

"I'm not talking, my dear, I'm whispering," I said, making my tones hissing keen. "Listen at 'em, fussing about the children committing sacrilege by romping at recess. Are you less sacred to Sam because his children have climbed over you and been rocked to sleep upon your knees since they were born? I reckon not!"

I could see Sally's colour begin to flame, and she cast her eye so coldly on Sam that he sat down.

"These stewards are just a gang of rougher, meaner, older boys, pushing the little fellows out of

this place because they can!" I whispered louder than ever. "Let's get up and leave."

With that I flounced out, followed by most of the women, and feeling as I usually do when I've flung the fat in the fire.

Next to a revival nothing livens a church so much as a furious row. And for the next few weeks every church in Berton experienced a kind of fierce animation. Most of the women were for opening them to the school. All the deacons, vestrymen, and stewards were against it. The children merely looked on, listened, and were doubtless glad their fathers' spiritual instincts were stronger than their paternal instincts, thus effectually closing the churches against them.

There was a large factory settlement two miles from Berton. In June these cotton mills were shut down. Five hundred people were thrown out of employment, and the town council passed a strict ordinance against "loafers," which, if it had been enforced, would have landed some of our best citizens in the calaboose. But it was designed to protect the town from the idle and destitute mill population. Thus Berton disposed of a grave problem after the accepted civil method for dealing with the unemployed. Whenever a question of ethics becomes too expensive to settle ethically, the best way is to settle it economically, to your own

advantage. Berton left the dead to bury their dead at the factory and went on comfortably about its own business.

But Felix Wade began to visit his own people less and to spend much of his time among the factory people. No one knew what he was doing out there. Some said he was organizing a mission. We did know that he was neglecting certain financial duties connected with his own church and that everything was in a bad way.

"The people are disaffected," Sam Parks said one day. "We can't even get quarterage. We have paid Wade less than two hundred dollars since he came here. It's a mystery how he gets on, unless, as most of us believe, he has private means of his own."

"Everything would clear up if he'd just start a revival. Why doesn't he do that?" Sally put in.

"He'd better start something. Warren's threatening to prefer charges against him at the next Quarterly Conference," grunted Sam.

"What kind of charges?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know—maladministration, neglect of duty, anything," he answered indifferently.

When I was returning from the Parkses that afternoon Brother Wade overtook me. Contrary to his usual bantering cheerfulness he had nothing to say, beyond admitting at my suggestion that

it was a beautiful day. He was changed. One could not say how, but there was a subtle difference, a remoteness, as if he had withdrawn his spirit from those present. I looked up at him keenly. He was very pale, with a thinness I had not noticed before. His clothes were covered with dust, and they were his best preaching clothes, which I thought was a pity. It was queer, seeing him so unkempt who had come to us so spick-and-span, as if we had worn him out.

"Well," I reflected to myself, "he has worn us out, too."

"Been to the factory again?" I asked, merely to break the silence.

"Yes," he answered.

"You are out there most of the time now, aren't you?" I went on, determined to get where I was going.

"The people need me," he replied with a gentle brevity which seemed to exclude me and Berton from that place.

"We need you, too. When will you begin the revival?"

"What revival?" he asked dully.

"We always have one during August in our church. Some of the members think you should begin it as soon as possible," I explained.

"I'd hoped for one before this time," he an-

swered regretfully, "but there is no chance. The church is not ready. The people will not give in."

"Not ready! What do you mean?" I exclaimed. "You have only to announce the services. The people are literally hungry for it."

"Sister Thompson, a religious revival is either a reform or a spiritual orgy."

"What's that?" I interrupted, feeling rebuked by his tone or by something in his manner.

"It would be easy to stir the emotions of the people in this town. Being dead in their virtues they naturally crave some excitement. If that excitement takes the form of a religious revival it satisfies the conscience and the appetite for intoxicants at the same time, but it is no less an orgy than any other form of inebriation."

"Don't blaspheme the Holy Spirit, Brother Wade!" I cried, deeply troubled.

"That's what many a so-called revival of religion is—a blasphemy," he answered coldly, and then went on after a pause: "When the members of a church refuse to do their plain duty, when they avoid the service of Christ as our church has done time and again this year, to start a revival in it would be to start a lie, to encourage the people to cover their transgressions with professions and prayers."

"I don't understand," I said sorrowfully.

"When people are moved spiritually they repent of their sins and resolve to do better. That's a revival."

"When people attend a highly emotional play in a theatre they are stirred to tears by the drama of sorrow. Their sympathies are with the hard-struggling hero and they hate the villain as we hate the devil in a revival. But all of that is lost motion morally. They go out to live exactly as they lived before. The same thing is true of a revival. It is a highly emotional dramatization of religious idealism which never affects the character of people who dodge the real issues in the Christian life."

"What issues have we dodged in this church?" I demanded indignantly.

"The members failed to support the mission work in the war zone. Our publican alone faced that."

"But I thought——"

"When there was a heated municipal campaign here in April more than a thousand dollars was spent to elect the reform ticket," he interrupted. "But when the school was burned the members of our church turned their own children into the streets rather than permit them to use the church as a school."

"Yes," I admitted, "that was wrong."

"When the mills closed out here four weeks ago,

and a whole community was left without employment—more than a hundred of them destitute—our reform mayor and council passed an ordinance which kept them from setting foot in this town, but not one dollar has been contributed to relieve their dire distress."

"But we couldn't support all those people, making mendicants of them!" I protested.

"That's what Christianity is for. It is the science of humanities applied intelligently to the social and industrial conditions of life. It is the church's business to study and actually to solve these problems. Believe me, dear lady, so long as we think of the life of Christ in the terms of doctrines and creeds we shall never discover what religion is. What we call a revival is often a false stimulation of the spiritual life, not only injurious but blasphemous."

"Many do repent of their sins during revivals. They are converted and they do live differently," I insisted.

"So far so good. But they are saved only from the sins they had, a meagre personal salvation. A man, I tell you, can be as dead in his virtues as any sinner in his transgressions, with a church for his sepulchre!"

I looked at him too scandalized to speak the indignation I felt.

"I have had a very strange experience," he went on calmly.

"You must have had!" I shot back.

"I was awakened to the reasonableness and the human importance of the teachings of Jesus outside the church. If I'd been brought up in the church, the Sunday-schools, all that, you know, I doubt if I should ever have realized the full significance of the Christian religion. It has been reduced to a formula there which the church can handle, as you'd manage any other business. You are taught certain doctrines of repentance and salvation. You accept a certain creed. Then you pay your dues, and leave it to the denominational boards to distribute your charities and send the missionaries. But nobody risks the great experiment of faith and sacrifice except according to established customs."

"Well, we do most of the good that's done in the world. And——"

"No, we do not," he interrupted. "Great spiritual forces are at work outside the church—blind, desperate energies, but all moving in the right direction. We shall live to see wonderful revivals of religion in this nation, which are preparing now in the patient adjustment of man to man. It is the world which belongs to God, the world, which all Christians are taught to hate.

And presently the world must save the churches again as it has purged them many times already of greed and hypocrisies."

"Who are you?" I demanded, stopping suddenly to look him up and down.

"Felix Wade, pastor in charge of the church at Berton," he answered simply.

"No, tell me who you really are," I insisted earnestly.

"The stranger within your gates, who is not likely to prove his wings," he said, smiling down at me in his familiar, teasing gentleness.

You can always tell when the apple has turned to ashes on a man's or a woman's lips. They are sure to smile too valiantly. I thought I detected the courage of despair in this face. So many times I have revived the sinking souls of preachers who were on the verge of heresy simply from physical exhaustion, complicated with some failure of cherished hopes, that I knew what to do.

"You'll think better of all these things when you have rested," I said kindly. "Come in now and have some tea."

"No, thanks, I'm really in a great hurry," he said, opening the gate for me.

"We've walked as if we were going for the doctor," I complained, realizing that I was quite out of breath.

"In fact I'm on my way now to telegraph for one," he said.

"Who's ill?" I asked anxiously.

"Everybody at the mills, or at least they are all in danger of being ill. We have fifty cases of typhoid there now. Frightful situation. Physician employed by the company left when the mills closed. No nurses. I hope to get what we imperatively need to-night, however," he said, hurrying off.

I went in and sat down upon my doorstep, which is low and concealed from the street by two boxwood bushes. I had a good deal to think about.

In the first place, I was troubled for the church. Preachers came and preachers went, but the church remained with us. Brother Wade was a spiritual radical. He wished us to live strictly as if we were in the spirit when we were still in our bodies. He was trying to live among us without a working knowledge of our strictly secular natures. I hope I'm a Christian woman, but my hope is tragically mixed with the experience I've had of just mortal perversity. And no man can put the wisdom of things as they are behind him without being more of a fool than the Lord requires of him. We had troubles ahead of us, I reflected with a sigh.

Then there was that thousand dollars which the church had given to the Red Cross work in

the war zone. Who had given it? Only a woman knows the sweet anguish of unsatisfied curiosity. And here was Brother Wade telegraphing for doctors and nurses for the factory folk. Who was paying for all that? I hoped he would not lay the matter before our church! He was always going off at a tangent. Well, he couldn't get very far on the quarterage the church paid him! The question was how he made ends meet. And, by the way, where was his car? I had not seen him in it for nearly a month. Sally and I ought to go out and take some things to the sick people at the factory—I'd mention that to her tomorrow.

Thus my thoughts ran back and forth the way they do when you know there is nothing you can do to help matters.

It was now quite dark, the soft warm darkness of a summer night. The town is always very quiet at this homing hour. Lights twinkled from windows down the street. Now and then a white moth blew by like a blossom in the darkness.

I may have dozed, which is a fault I have when I sit too long in one place. Anyhow it seemed to me that I had been listening drowsily to voices for some time before I realized that in fact two persons were talking with suppressed animation across the street.

I arose and peered over the boxwood. I could distinguish Lum by his white clothes, standing in the side door of the parsonage. The other person was a woman, wrapped on this summer night in a long black coat.

"No, him a Clishtian now!" he was saying.

"Don't speak so loud!" the woman cautioned.

To my horror I recognized the thin childish tones of Lily Triggs' speaking voice. The next moment she moved like a darker shade down the street.

## CHAPTER VII

IF THERE is anything worse for a woman's peace of mind than having something which she cannot tell, it is suspecting something which she does not know.

The criticism Brother Wade had made of the church to me was a breach of loyalty unpardonable in a Methodist preacher. What I thought was that a man can go so far right that, for all practical purposes, he is hopelessly wrong. To have offered this defense would have been to confess that the Christian faith, as taught in the New Testament, is an impossible religion—which is not so. I was torn between the devotion of a lifetime to this little weatherbeaten church in Berton and sympathy with this strange young preacher, who was beginning to show the tension of a hopeless struggle. I could not be with him. I had neither the strength nor the courage to make such radical changes in the habits of my spiritual life, so long adjusted to just the weather of my own human nature.

I doubt that this is a Christian civilization, strictly speaking, or that there ever can be such

a civilization. The best of us pass, like Moses, with only the vision of the Promised Land of our souls, which we are not fit to enter. Our institutions are designed to meet the emergencies and desires of human beings—not immortal spirits. Our immediate salvation depends upon material conditions. The church proves this no less than a business corporation. The ideal may be spiritual, but the active aim is always more and more material. The only difference is in the methods employed.

Men trained to business and worldly ambitions achieve wealth and success by their own efforts and labours. The church proclaims the Gospel of sacrifice and achieves wealth and success. But it never earns! From the earliest days of religious idolatry, when men made burnt offerings to their gods, until now, we are still inspired by faith to give of our wealth and substance to the church—always giving, giving, until the earth is heavily laden with churches and other religious organizations, built and supported by the treasures which we think we have laid up in heaven; while the poor are still poorer and the good not much better.

It may be because I am old and tired, but I cannot see that these conditions can be changed. It is not so bad as it is just natural. Besides,

every time the church gets too far ahead in the game the world steps in and cleans it up—which is also right.

What Brother Wade wanted was something supernatural. And no one is equal to that except momentarily. You cannot keep it up and remain sane.

But to have repeated in Berton what he had said would have started a scandal—a very easy thing to do at any time. This gave me a compressed-air feeling every time I met Sally Parks or any one else who wanted to talk about what a bad fix the church was in.

The thing I suspected gave me even more trouble. Since the night I had seen Lily Triggs talking with that heathen Brother Wade keeps for a servant I could not rest. I became an involuntary spy upon the parsonage. I'd slip across my parlour to the window and part the curtains slyly to see if anything was going on over there that should not go on. This was wrong and gave me a sense of guilt. But the unknown past of Felix Wade seemed to be licking out its tongue at me with deadly fascination.

It is not so easy for a man to live above suspicion, no matter how well he lives. Being a man at all is in itself a very suspicious circumstance. The reputation of the sex is not good. There is

a mean but generally accepted theory that, even if he is innocent, he is in imminent danger of one or two temptations. He has never risen above having his virtue conjugated in the subjunctive mood. He may, can, or must be good. He might, could, would, or should be good. Or, saddest of all, he might, could, would, or should have been good! It all depends upon whether accident or association casts him upon the shifting sands of the wrong woman's smile.

I do not hold these views myself, but the strictly feminine serpent in me does. Brother Wade preached an austere Gospel and he lived a consecrated life. My suspicion was that, to be so good, he must have been very bad. He was like one who takes a desperate remedy for a desperate trouble. I doubt that Saint Francis of Assisi would have gone the lengths he did in piety and renunciation if he had not gone first all the gaits in the other direction. I am well acquainted with the ordinary good man, who has never had any vices and who is as confirmed in his virtues as any one could be in the tobacco habit.

We have had more than one pastor here with only a second-hand knowledge of the wicked world. Every one of them lambasted us with an occasional cat-o'-nine-tails sermon on dancing and other worldly amusements of which we were

awkwardly innocent. I do not know why it is, but if a preacher has never seen the inside of a ballroom or danced with a woman he is sure to have an evil imagination about those things. Not, you understand, that there is any question about its being wrong to dance or to enjoy many other diversions which I have often sinfully craved, but there is an awful possibility that this kind of preaching actually nourishes our instincts for these sins which we cannot afford.

Brother Wade was different. He never referred to the iniquities of the world. He showed none of the spiritual fox fire so often employed by the emotional evangelist when he entertains the congregation with lurid descriptions of the "life he once led." If only he had confided something of his past life the church would have been drawn closer to him; but he was the most reserved, self-effacing preacher I ever knew. He asked neither sympathy nor help for himself. He was for binding us all, hand and foot, to the cross of Christ.

September is usually the best month of the year in this church; for by this time we have usually paid most of the assessments, passed through a revival, and been furbished up spiritually. But this year we were able to make no such terms with the Almighty. We had the feeling that our salvation rent had not been paid, and that we should like to

forgive each other the usual trespasses, as we always do, stirred by a revival. But we did not know how to go about it on a "cold collar." One's spirit must be sweetly holden by some divine illusion before he can walk up to a man he knows has wronged him and say: "Forgive me, brother; the fault was all mine." And this is the accepted way. If you tell the truth and say, "I forgive you, my brother, though you were entirely in the wrong," you have only clinched his hard feelings against you with another year's grip. You must admit that you were the offender, especially if you were not, but the victim of his injustice.

I reckon I have made friends with Charlotte Warren a dozen times this way by telling a lie just for conscience's sake—which is a thing I cannot do unless I've been in the wine press of a revival and had my spirit badly bruised by the Word. But if I do admit that the fault is my fault she is very gracious about it, and says it's all right; and that Christians must forgive one another as they hope to be forgiven. And won't I come round to tea at her house on Wednesday night, just to show the Woman's Missionary Society, which is always the bloody sands where we have our difficulties, that we are once more in love and charity with one another? These peace-offering teas of Charlotte's are the bitterest pills I've ever had to swallow as a

Christian woman. And I always take them during revivals, when I'm unnaturally strong in the faith.

But Charlotte had not spoken to me for three months now, owing to a circumstance I shall relate presently. And we were getting farther apart every day, owing to the lack of the usual religious stimulation.

Sometimes I was indignant with our pastor; then I'd see the situation with a kind of malevolent wit. The church was filled every Sunday with Methodist orphans, listening like strangely chastened children to Brother Wade preaching the Gospel of laying down our lives here and now for Christ, hoping hungrily that he'd relent and give us the chance to do the usual superficial things in the name of the Lord.

I cannot remember a time when the members of this church did not groan and complain at the amount we are assessed for Conference collections. The stewards give the pastor to understand that he'll do well if he gets 50 per cent; then the struggle begins to raise them. It is like shoving a heavily loaded team up a long hill—the preacher shouting encouragement or threatening us with a loss of reputation in the Conference. A few old saints behind push for dear life.

Tom Warren has a way of sucking his teeth with

a sort of sibilant wrath at such times. We can always hear him clicking and clucking in the amen corner, because he is our one rich man and our chief stingy man, and he knows everybody is waiting to see what he subscribes. Well, it was funny now to watch him begin to stir angrily in his seat and suck through his teeth as if he were spitting fire at Brother Wade, who would not ask him for his money.

The Baptists held their "protracted meeting," and the Presbyterians had a series of dignified devotional services. The Primitive Baptists at the bottom of the hill had their "foot-washing," and still the Methodists remained dead in their trespasses and sins. We could not measure up to Brother Wade's Gospel, but we wanted to be revived. We longed to sing—

*Just as I am, without one plea,——*
*O Lamb of God, we come to Thee—*

and come to the altar as usual during the singing of the last stanza—and let it go at that, with all our sins and backslidings. But our pastor went on stoning us with the Gospel of service and sacrifice. He even cut out the experience meeting we sometimes had on Wednesday night when the brethren and sisters told what was the matter with them and asked the prayers of all Christian people.

The tragic figure in every church is some man who believes he has committed the unpardonable sin and that the Lord has forsaken him. This is always a man. I never knew or heard of a woman who thought she could do so enormously wrong.

David Rivers was the apostate in our church. He lived alone in a sawmill shack in the woods above the town. He was of great stature—roughly made, as if he had got himself together out of the deeper earth. His beard was black. The hair came low upon his forehead, like a coarse black fringe. His eyes were dark and expressionless. No one knew from whence he came or anything of his history. He was merely the sorrowful shade of a man who had drifted in with a sawmill. His business was the snaking of logs down the hillsides to this mill.

He never came to Berton except to purchase supplies. On these rare occasions he attended to his business and hurried away, looking no man in the face, never speaking if it was possible to avoid speech.

But when there was a revival in our church he came regularly to the night services, sitting far back, like a damned soul, in the darkest corner of the house. He was always the first to respond when penitents were invited to seek forgiveness for their sins, stumbling like a somnambulist down the

aisle to the altar. We prayed and wrestled with him in vain. He never received the blessing. Each year he returned to us at this season, always hurrying to the altar, never praying for himself, never confiding his troubles; merely kneeling there and staring straight before him like one who beholds a horrid vision.

Now as the summer waned, with no prospect of a revival in our church, David began to appear every day with the shades of evening in Berton, still silent, but with the animation of a strange terror in his haggard face. He would come striding down the street and halt in front of the church, stare at the darkened windows, then hurry away.

One evening late in September Brother Wade was sitting on my porch when David's great straddling figure loomed in the moonlight on the opposite side of the street. He stood regarding the dark and silent church. Once he raised his hands above his head in a gesture of frenzied despair. At last he turned and walked swiftly toward the parsonage, mounted the steps, and struck heavily upon the door.

"Who is that man?" asked Brother Wade.

"David Rivers," I answered.

"He should have been called Saul," he said, rising to answer the summons rapped so imperiously.

"He has been seeking religion for years. They

say he is an apostate," I explained, speaking very low, for the man had caught sight of us and was now crossing the street.

"Come in, David," I said when he reached the steps.

"Is this the pastor of the Methodist Church?" he asked, fixing his sombre eyes upon Brother Wade.

"Yes," Brother Wade answered, advancing and offering his hand. "What can I do for you?"

David stood, with his long arms hanging, his face lifted.

"When's the revival going to start over there?" he demanded, with a motion of his head toward the church.

"I don't know. Why?" asked Brother Wade.

"It must begin! I can't stand it no longer. I want another chance!" he cried, again lifting his arms in that gesture of despair.

Brother Wade went swiftly down the steps and laid his hand upon the man's shoulder.

"I've sinned! Do you understand that?" David groaned.

"Yes," answered Brother Wade gently.

"I've sinned the unpardonable sin," he whispered hoarsely. "All the year I am by myself with it, up there in the woods."

He paused, looked about him as if the thing he had done was visible. Then he went on:

"I'll never be forgiven. But when the meeting's going on over there in the church, and all the Christian people are praying for me, it ain't so terrible. That's the only rest I get."

"There is but one sin," said Brother Wade—"the sin against love."

"Yes; that's it. How'd you know?" gasped the man.

"There is but one forgiveness," Brother Wade went on in tones of authority.

"Not for me!" interrupted David.

"That is, to love; to give your life in love," the preacher continued, holding the eyes of the apostate with a stronger gaze.

"I don't know what you mean," David moaned. "And I can't pray."

"To love is to pray," answered the other.

"But not to be forgiven! You don't know what I've done!" he cried.

"That makes no difference. To love is to be forgiven."

"But I can't love. Don't you understand? I'm damned! I can't even hate; I'm dead!"

"To serve is to live!" came the reply.

It was as if I beheld two spirits wrestling upon my doorstep, which is a fearsome sight when one

of them thinks he is damned and the other thinks salvation is a life sentence to service and sacrifice.

I slipped quietly into the house, feeling that this was no place for an old woman who takes her religion according to the emergencies of the moment, and maybe trusts the Lord more than her daily deeds warrant.

More than an hour elapsed before they finally concluded that strange argument, and I heard the two men going off together.

My knowledge of worldly churches in cities is limited; but in the villages and country, where there are wide silences, and much home life of the heaven and the earth upon the hills to encompass the brooding spirit of men, these apostates are familiar figures. They usually discover themselves during protracted meetings, and they rarely recover from the horror of the conviction that they have committed the unpardonable sin, though it often transpires that such a man cannot tell himself exactly what he has done.

Once, many years ago, a famous minister of the Methodist Church in this state was preaching a sermon on apostasy. Suddenly a man, just an ordinary farmer, rose and left the house. That night his body was found within fifty yards of the church door. He had slain himself while the altar was filled with penitents, drawn there

by the terror they had of the fate with which they were threatened.

It is all very well to say that a suicide is mentally defective, but the human soul is a very delicate instrument. It never swings so far wrong in a bad man as many suspect nor so far right in a good one as we are inclined to believe; but let it once balance too far either way and the perfectly normal man becomes a defective. He can be a dipsomaniac spiritually as surely as any other drunkard may be the victim of delirium.

Maybe it is blasphemous to say such a thing, but my belief is that we should pray the Lord to save us from extreme worldliness and from extreme piety, and especially from the extreme darkness of our own rational minds.

A few days later I met Taggy Lipton coming out of Sam Parks' grocery store.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked as we walked down the street together. "David Rivers has professed religion!"

"Well, that's a mercy," I answered, feeling more curiosity than I was willing to show.

"He's sold his oxen, quit the sawmill, and taken the position of orderly in that hospital Brother Wade is running for the factory people with the fever," she explained.

"But how'd he get religion?" I asked.

"That's how—he sold all he had, gave it to the hospital, and then went to work there. John Henry says you wouldn't know David, he's so up in his spirit; ready to laugh and talk like anybody else."

"Brother Wade had better mind what he's doing!" I could not refrain from saying.

"Why, I thought you'd be glad we got at least one convert!" she exclaimed.

"He's put David up to sacrificing the only means he has of a livelihood. What will the man do? That hospital is only a temporary affair," I explained.

"Did you know that Brother Wade sold his car?" she asked.

"I suspected as much," I answered, for we had not seen his fine big car since he roared out of town with it one morning on one of those mysterious trips he took shortly after the fever epidemic started at the factory.

"John Henry says it's just as well he did get rid of it, for the church is not paying enough quarterage to keep him in gasoline. Everybody seems to think he has means of his own," she concluded.

"Which is a poor reason for cheating him out of his salary as pastor," I retorted.

It was about this time that Brother Wade's bulldog began to come to my door every morning and look up at me more agreeably than usual, as if he'd adopted me as a friend of the family and was by the same token entitled to the scraps from the table. I thought nothing of this circumstance, because Lum was in and out of my kitchen every day, pretending to learn my ways of cooking. The dog always accompanied him. I was loath to feed him; but he was very thin and I thought the heathen was neglecting him, so he shared the scraps with the cat. Then I'd take the broom to him and drive him home, for fear Brother Wade would think I was bribing his ugly beast to stay at my house.

One afternoon I went to see Sally Parks about the missionary program for our society. When I came home, about six o'clock, that dog was sitting out in the yard looking very queer and unsettled in his mind.

"Begone!" I cried, stamping my foot at him.

But, instead of going, he shot round the corner of the house as if he had urgent business in the backyard. I hurried in to get the broom, which is the only weapon I ever keep.

At this moment I heard a door closing softly with a creak. It was the pantry door, because that is the only one in the house which makes a

noise. I stood for an instant transfixed with horror.

The woman never lived who did not expect to find a robber in the house. I can no more get into my bed at night without looking under it than I can sleep without saying my prayers. I reckon this is the cave woman's instinct—not for burglars, but just the elemental fear of a strange man; for I never look anywhere else for him. Women never do. But now, after all these years of expecting to find him, he literally was there—not under my poor old innocent bed, but in my pantry, of course.

The floor vibrated beneath the quick slippered tread of feet across the kitchen floor. No power on earth could have drawn me one step forward to defend my things. If I'd had the strength to move I should have fled back out of the front door and left him in undisputed possession.

At this moment I saw Lum glide through the back door, bent double, with his apron covering something. Indignation gave me a swiftness that I have not had for many a year. I rushed out in time to see him dart back toward the kitchen.

He was flying through the hall when I met him face to face, with the broom lifted high over my head.

He made some kind of a mewing heathen sound

as he rushed past, merely turning me sidewise to make room for his own greatly exaggerated person, for my hall is narrow and I am two-thirds the width of it.

I can only hope no one saw me chasing that heathen across the street to the parsonage. The transit was made in silence, for I had no wind to spare in futile maledictions; but when he turned at bay in his own kitchen I still had the broom and the will to use it.

I snatched his apron aside and disclosed the parsonage bread tray filled with an assortment of my household supplies—a pile of flour in one end, with a lump of lard as large as a cocoanut embedded in it; a pound of butter; a can filled with coffee; and the only jar of raspberry marmalade I had left from our last Quarterly Conference. Wedged in between the butter and the coffee can, I could see the wrapper on a cake of bath soap.

"What does this mean?" I cried.

"Eats," he explained simply, regarding me with a graven-image expression.

I was too much astonished by his mild shamelessness to speak.

"Take a little every day," he explained after a pause.

"So you've been doing this before!" I exclaimed.

He nodded his head. Then he set the tray down,

moved across the room with that slick tread he has, flung the pantry door open, and beckoned me to enter. I did, with a certain feeling of proprietorship, for I had helped many a time to stock this pantry. Every shelf was empty. There was not a dust of flour in the bin; not a scrap of meat. An old cracked-rice jar lay yawning sidewise in one corner.

"What—what's the matter here?" I cried.

He merely grunted a curious half sound and spread his palms downward, with a listless gesture.

"How long has it been like that?" I demanded, drawing back from that accusing pantry.

"One—mebbe two mont's. No mon. Velly bad!"

"Who else have you been stealing from?" I asked with widening suspicion.

He made a gesture with both hands, spreading them like thin yellow claws in a manner that indicated the whole town.

"From everybody?" I gasped.

"No, no! Not the Baps. From the Methodys. Owe my master. No pay. Takee leetle here, leetle there. Do velly well," he explained coolly.

There is an element of the virago in every up-and-doing woman, which never is converted to meekness or patience. When things go too far wrong in my house, especially in the kitchen, I

always kick the cat, lifting him humanely upon the top of my foot and flinging him furiously across the room. It does not hurt him and it relieves the snarled bobbin of my nerves as "strong language" relieves a man.

As I stood staring at that heathen, flattened against the pantry door like a yellow shadow, I felt the cat-kicking feeling coming on. But he was shaped so little like a cat that I was obliged to seize him by the collar instead.

"Never do such a thing again, you heathen rogue!" I exclaimed, shaking him violently.

"No can starve," he insisted imperturbably the moment I released him.

"What will your master say?" I threatened.

"Know nothing; say nothing," he answered shrewdly.

Well, here was a situation—our pastor keeping soul and body together upon rations stolen by a heathen, while the church owed him several hundred dollars in salary. We have had preachers here who were not above asking for things, even when they received all that was promised on quarterage. Now we had one who would not even ask for what was due him.

I was in no condition financially to provide for another family, but there was nothing else to do until something could be done. I ordered Lum to

follow and went back to add a few things that his depredations had not included.

While we filled the basket, Lum, animated by the prospect of proper food, was moved to confidences.

"My master velly lich before we come here. Spend the money fast; have big time. Then much trouble—dam' lady; dam' wine; dam' those politics—everything. Give all he have to his God. Velly expensive being a Clishtian," he squeaked.

"Where'd he live then?" I could not resist asking.

He retreated; he effaced himself. He became the graven image of stupidity.

"In New York?"

Still no reply.

"Where he knew Lily Triggs?"

I had stuck a knife in him; he would die without flinching, but speak—never! So his face told me.

"What did she want the night she talked to you at the back door?" I demanded suddenly.

"Velly dam' lady that; no speakee to her," he returned after considering the question.

"Yes, you did. I saw you both," I said sternly.

"No!" he lied, laying hold of the basket in a great hurry to be gone.

I went out on the porch and sat down to con-

sider what should be done. We have always had donation parties for our pastors when we had reason to believe their domestic ends were not meeting. As many of us as could get together would descend upon the parsonage some evening. A dray would follow, loaded with groceries. The women brought cakes, jellies; even a bedquilt sometimes if it was a very cold winter.

But it was not so easy to get donations for a preacher who had alienated many prominent members of the church and who appeared to be ignorant of this fact. More than that, he was now suspected of being a rich crank. How should I go about telling the people he was living on their involuntary charity? I recalled a circumstance in this connection that was funny besides being scandalous in the light of Lum's confession.

Charlotte Warren had some very fine fowls—three hens and a rooster—which were her pride, because they laid so many eggs. She was now mystified about these hens. They had not produced an egg in weeks. She told Taggy that she had spent half they were worth buying eggmaking food for them. She said she knew they wanted to lay because they cackled as if they did.

"And would you believe it, Sister Lipton," she concluded finally, "one of those hens went to setting without ever laying an egg! The poor thing

thought she had, you know, on account of that high-powered food I'd been giving her."

Taggy, who told me of this, said she thought it must be a thief, because she had missed five pullets from her spring hatchings. She almost knew we had a professional rogue in Berton, because so many people were complaining. Milk delivered at certain houses was taken, the thief alternating from one to the other. The Peterses lost their cantaloupes, and Sam Parks sat up one whole night trying to catch the person who was taking vegetables from his garden.

"He's no ordinary rogue," Sally complained, "for he actually stole the only bloom I had on my Martha Washington bush last night."

When I passed through the parsonage that afternoon I saw this rose languishing in a vase in the dining-room table!

Brother Wade was the only literal believer I had ever known in the Lord's promise to feed the young ravens—and he was living by the depredations of that heathen on his neighbours!

If the Scriptures I do not understand will leave me alone I will not push them too close with experiments. I don't pretend to understand the meaning of "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? . . . or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" My belief is that the Lord always used

highly poetic language and that He only meant that we should not give too much ambition merely to the getting of substance; for I have observed that they who make no provision for the future either steal or starve, or live on the charity of those who have been very thoughtful of the future.

What I am trying to say is this: There is no place in the world, as it is now organized, for the austere renunciations that Brother Wade preached and practised, to the despair of all Christian people. Growth in grace consists chiefly in keeping up the struggle that no man wins.

I had about made up my mind to call up Sally Parks over the 'phone and tell her I'd been over to the parsonage that day and found the pantry empty, when I saw Brother Wade entering the gate.

He came up, saluted me in his pleasantly exaggerated manner, dropped into the chair beside me, and leaned back. He looked very tired, calm, and blessed, as a man does when he's giving all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned—and has charity besides.

We exchanged some remarks about the weather. He thought there was already the edge of autumn in those September days.

"The yellow butterflies have not come yet, so we can't tell when we shall have frost," I said.

"What have butterflies to do with frost? I thought they were the air blossoms of summer days," he commented idly.

"When you see tiny yellow butterflies rising and wheeling low above the grass in the meadows, it is a sign that we shall have enough frost in ten days to turn the leaves the same colour," I explained.

He said he hoped they'd come soon. I knew he was thinking of the sick people at the factory who needed the bracing cold weather. I wanted to ask him how he got the money to keep up that improvised hospital, pay the doctor and two nurses. I knew that I should break over presently and ask him one of half a dozen questions that were gathering a kind of speaking force in my mind.

"Dear lady," he said after a thoughtful pause, "do you happen to have any gruel in the house?"

"Gruel?" I exclaimed, staring at him over my spectacles. "Why should I have gruel? I'm never ill."

"That's true," smiling frankly. "You are so marvellously well in the spirit and humanly hardy in the flesh that I could never think of you in a sublimated body with wings!"

"The Lord must make them extra strong, at any rate," I replied, laughing.

He slipped lower in his chair, stretched his long legs, crossed his dusty shoes, and gazed with that

narrowing smile at his own thoughts, which was a habit he had, very provoking to me now, when I wanted to know more about the gruel business.

"Ever think of this," he went on, without looking up, "that all the angels and saints mentioned in the Scriptures are referred to as he's?"

"That's because the Scriptures were all written by men—the ballots they cast in advance for their own immortality. The prejudices of your sex have laid a sort of spiritual impropriety upon us in the next world," I retorted sharply.

"I don't know," he laughed; "women may be needed so much forever in this world that the Lord can't spare you just to sing soprano in heaven. There is so much kindness of light in some of you; so much darkness in others of you. You are like the weather, which is bright to-day and cloudy to-morrow. You, for example, would make a fine, large, round day which might return, like Halley's Comet—only oftener—for thousands of years. You'd come, I imagine, somewhere in the harvest season of summer weather; very kind and golden, with just a cold snap to your early morning, and a wide lavender mist spreading over your evening, like the answer to all the prayers you've ever said, changed to that peace and silence one feels then."

"Listen to me, Brother Wade!" I exclaimed

earnestly. "Never say such things abroad in this town!"

"I won't. I was speaking in strictest confidence," he laughed. "But why this warning?"

"Because people do not understand poetic forms of speech here. They don't anywhere, guided by doctrines and creeds. The most awful experience I ever had as a Christian woman came from telling Sally Parks that I remembered playing with Eve's little girls as a child, and later straying off with the Cleopatra Sisters in Egypt!"

Then I had to tell him about that. During the narrative he rumpled his cowlick and laughed like a boy.

"Well, I'll be careful not to involve you in another scandal," he said at last. "But, really, women do remind me more of the weather than they do of anything else. We have only one patient left now in our hospital at the factory; and she's just a poor little dusk of a woman, very dim, as if she'd fade into night presently without a single star. It is for her I wanted the gruel," he explained.

"Can't you get it hot out there?" I asked, not ungraciously, merely intimating the essential character of gruel.

"The fact is, we've about come to the end of our resources," he said soberly. "The nurses left last

week. The doctor is gone. And we've used up everything. This girl was a factory hand—no kindred; no one to see her through; only an old woman we've hired to take care of her. The people who have not drifted away are destitute."

"Where'd you get the money to keep up that hospital, anyhow?" I demanded suddenly.

He looked up at me as if I'd committed a breach of etiquette. But I've always been superior to my manners when the emergency demanded something stronger.

"Not from the people in Berton?" I persisted.

"Many of them have sent out supplies, you know," he hedged.

"Not funds to pay nurses and buy medicines. You have spent a lot of money out there."

He was silent.

"Where is your car?" I asked, closing in.

"Sold it," he admitted, but as if that was none of my business.

"So that's how you raised the money to take care of fifty cases of typhoid fever!" I accused. "You'd better have spent some of it on your own living expenses!"

"I do very well, thanks to Lum," he put in quickly. "He thinks he's only a heathen. He's really one of the best Christians I know."

"He's one of the slickest——" I caught myself in time and did not finish the sentence.

"The term slick applies only to Lum's feet——"

"—and his hands," I added significantly.

"I thought you liked him," he said with a hint of reproach.

"I've worked for the salvation of the heathen for forty years, but I don't trust one when he gets into my house; or even when he's across the street in yours!" I replied, with unchristian candour.

"He's the most frugal of mortals," he defended. "I really wonder how he manages to provide so well on what I've been able to spare."

"It's a mercy you don't know how he manages!" I sniffed.

"Well, he hasn't cooked the cat yet," he laughed, missing the point. "I assure you that he is a devoted and faithful creature."

"Your devoted and faithful creature was seen one night not long ago talking to Mrs. Lily Triggs at the back door of the parsonage," I said, and was frightened the next moment at the black change in Felix Wade's face. But it was too late to retreat; so I went on:

"Mrs. Triggs has been a thorn in the church here for four years. One way or another she has been the cause of the removal of four pastors in succession."

"I have never spoken to her. She is no longer in our choir. She does not even attend services," he said, on the defensive for the first time since I had known him.

"Which makes it all the more suspicious that she should be seen after dark whispering with your servant," I replied.

"Who saw them?" he asked.

"I did. She wanted something. I heard her tell him not to speak so loud."

He sat with his head bowed, a deep frown upon his face.

"Brother Wade," I began again, "no matter how innocent he is, a preacher cannot survive a mystery. It's a kind of shade that stands between him and his people. They feel it, and they resent it when they would not resent having a reformed criminal for their pastor, so long as they knew—actually knew—all about him. I do not know why this is so, but it is. The members of this church have been slinking round in your darkness for a year!"

"And you?" he asked in a tone which might have been that of a dying Cæsar to his friend Brutus.

"Oh, I've taken you along with the other part of my religion—by faith; but, humanly speaking, I've been uneasy about you. Something's going to happen presently," I said.

"It has already happened," he answered.

"What?" I asked in alarm.

"One of the stewards has preferred charges against me to the Presiding Elder," he said, as if it did not matter at all.

"What kind of charges?" I asked, knowing that Tom Warren had been meddling.

"Maladministration; neglect of duty. He was entirely justified from his point of view," he admitted calmly.

"But you have been a good pastor. We've never had a man who visited the people more, even during this awful summer when you've had so much to do at the factory," I said, changing to the other side and defending him.

"I've been a failure, though, as the financial agent of the church. I have not raised the assessments. That is one of the charges."

"Why don't you do it?" I demanded.

"I made a mistake. I did not understand when I entered the ministry of this church. I should never have taken upon me the duties of a financial agent under the disguise of the ministry of Christ if I had known what I was doing," he said simply.

"But it is not so!" I cried indignantly. "Hundreds of men and women have been converted in this church."

"Converted to the church; sworn to support its institutions—a heavy burden; merely to practise personal Christian charity with what little they can spare after the church is paid. I took the same vows. But, not realizing how these people have been trained to perform their Christian duties of love and sacrifice through a corporation, I have been loath to deprive them of the privileges they should enjoy.

"You know how it has been. They cannot serve God personally—only through the church. It's like hiring a certain body of men to do your peace-and-good-will to men, according to the personal ambition, judgment, and ability of those men —religion by proxy. There's no such thing!"

"But we must have some kind of organization," I insisted, "some methods to avoid overlapping interests in Christian work; and, worse still, the sentimental blindness of foolish giving and foolish service."

"Undoubtedly, yes. But the present methods are blindly sentimental. What is the real trouble now with this church? Indignant because they have not been asked to pay six hundred dollars for Home Missions—which might as well be foreign; and for Foreign Missions—when several hundred people two miles distant are suffering for the necessities of life. Fifty children out there have

had neither school nor teacher this year. The money paid by the women in the four churches of Berton for Foreign Missions would have paid a teacher for nine months. It's all wrong! This church should have given fifty dollars to Missions this year, and a thousand dollars at least to the relief of the destitute at the factory—to say nothing of what it owed to the sufferers in the war zone."

I thought of Doctor Edd and the thousand dollars already sent, but something warned me not to mention this.

"I am also charged with neglect of my spiritual duties to the church. We have had no revival. The complaint is that I devoted my time and services to another community at the season usually set aside here for the revival."

"We do need one," I put in; "we've never been so cold as a church."

"A man may easily deceive himself into a sense of peace with God, hypnotized by emotional conditions; but it is not the right peace!" he exclaimed passionately. "You pay for that with all you are and have and can do!"

I sighed. One cannot argue with a fanatic. He is always impossibly right and practically wrong.

"This steward does not appear to have heard of Mrs. Triggs' evening visit to the parsonage," he

said presently. "Otherwise he might have added another charge."

"You know I would never have mentioned that!" I cried, offended.

"No; you are incapable of that. You would suffer in silence any doubt of your pastor, being made beautifully biased in his defense. Still you have suffered!" He looked up, gently accusing.

"I have never questioned any preacher we've had here. They have been men of unimpeachable integrity. But Lily Triggs is dangerous. She's especially fatal one way or the other to preachers," I insisted.

"Well, in confidence, I will tell you what she wanted," he said, looking at me with a half smile.

"You knew of her visit then?" I exclaimed.

"Oh, yes! Lum informed me when I came back from the telegraph station that night. She wanted a package of her letters which I had."

"You have had letters from her?" I exclaimed, recalling Lily's methods.

"Not written to me," he corrected, smiling grimly.

"Before I entered the ministry I was an attorney in New York. Five years ago I defended a divorce suit brought by his wife against Oliver Triggs. The purpose of the defense was to avoid paying alimony. Part of the evidence introduced was a number of letters written by Mrs. Triggs to a

certain professor who gave her vocal lessons, if I remember correctly.

"We lost the case, owing to the fact that these letters, though highly sentimental in character, were not actually incriminating. The amount Triggs was compelled to pay her ruined him. He is a clerk in a lawyer's office now, earning barely enough to keep body and soul together. The woman disappeared. I never heard of her again until I was astonished to find her conducting the music in your church when I came here. Naturally she dropped out, and naturally I did not expose her. There was nothing to tell which could not have been inferred from the fact that she was divorced.

"But she thinks I still have those letters. Lum tells me she offered him a hundred dollars for them. As a matter of fact, they are on file in New York with the other papers in the case."

He rose and stood for a moment staring at that church across the way.

"One cannot escape from one life into another life. When I entered the church I did so, you may say, almost secretly, through the influence of one of your bishops. I severed relations with my friends and everything connected with the world in which I lived. I wished to be literally a different man. The first person I saw when I entered the church over there was Mrs. Triggs, who knew me—

by reputation at least—as quite a different kind of man, with exactly the opposite aims and views from those I hold now."

"But you still hold them?" I asked anxiously, feeling that things had gone hard with him, and the end not yet in sight.

"Oh, yes," he answered calmly. "This has been a very profitable year for me. When I came here the spiritual life was still more or less of an adventure in which I had invested—heavily. Now it is a reality. One gets to feel very snug in his soul, a small, clean place—just wide enough for a ladder, with his own angels ascending and descending; no roof over his head; nothing in his pockets; no fears in his heart. For the first time in my life I have enjoyed perfect freedom—like a man started upon a long holiday, with no burden upon his back but the light of the sun."

It was as good a description as I'd ever heard of an ordinary tramp. As I watched him swinging across the street, evidently in no way cast down by the charges against him, I wondered whether this was not the literal fate that would overtake him. The history of strictly religious pilgrims has always been a dingy tale of the road, of pitying charity, and the contempt of the sane world. It was no work of Providence that he had that heathen to steal his daily bread for him.

Providence is an honest man, and if this kept up the stewards would have charges to make that he could not face.

I went back into the kitchen to prepare the broth, which I had persuaded him was better for the invalid at the factory than the gruel.

About eight o'clock Molly Brown came in. The October evenings were already cool and we sat down before the fire, Molly telling me all the time that she didn't have a minute to spare and ought not to have come in at all.

"But I just had to show you this," she said, drawing a letter from her pocket and offering it to me. "It's from Doctor Edd; the first news we've had of him since he left," she explained as I opened the soiled yellow sheet.

It was not dated or located.

"Dear Molly," it began, "this is written from the top bunk of an ambulance. I am in it. Wade furnished the thousand dollars he gave me when I left Berton—all except fifty cents. I do not know who gave that. He is a queer duck; bound me to secrecy. But in case anything happens the people should know. I am all right. This has been a great experience, well worth such a life as mine. Tell Wade——"

Here the scrawl ended. I looked up, to see the tears running down Molly's cheeks.

"I always said Doctor Edd was a good man," she sobbed softly, "and he was brave, too; always fighting in his own lost ditch; never giving up, as any other man might have done, getting drunk so often."

"What are we going to do about that thousand dollars, Molly?" I began, after we had talked enough about Doctor Edd. "Every Baptist and Presbyterian in this town thinks the Methodist Church gave it. And we didn't."

"You'd better call Sister Warren and tell her. It's the quickest way to tell everybody," Molly suggested simply.

"Charlotte is not speaking to me now," I objected.

"Why ain't she speaking to you?"

"Because when I heard that Tom Warren was getting ready to prefer charges against Brother Wade, I said somebody ought to prefer charges against him for backbiting the preacher, and, as a steward, for not paying him anything to live on; and, as a church member, for keeping up that feud with Roger Peters about the line fence. She told me I had better attend to my own business. I told her that was what I was doing as a Christian woman. She said I was a Christian busybody. You know how Charlotte goes on when she gets mad," I concluded.

Molly looked at me. I will not say that her expression was accusative, but there was a mild judgment in her eye which made me feel like Charlotte's twin sin. And I changed the subject by telling her how little there was in the parsonage pantry.

I wouldn't give a fig for Molly's courage, or for her wisdom, when it comes to putting up a fight for principles; but she is the best woman in this church when it comes to simple good deeds that she can do with her two hands.

"I'll just go round among our members to-morrow and get some things for the preacher," she said, bidding me good-night.

So that was done. It was now only two weeks before the Annual Conference met. Molly would provide enough supplies to keep Lum out of mischief. Meantime, I resolved that Tom Warren should not bring reproach upon Felix Wade if it was possible to work up a better sentiment in the church. But, first, Brother Wade must give me standing rights to make such an appeal; so, without telling him what was on foot, I told him a few things for his own good.

"You have no right to impose your convictions upon the members of this church," I said. "We are trained to pay so much every year on the various assessments."

He listened patiently, as a man does sometimes when he is convinced against his will.

"It is your duty to ask for these various amounts and leave it to every man's conscience to give what he chooses. You have then placed the responsibility where it belongs," I argued, so shrewdly that he laughed.

"Very well; I will announce the assessments next Sunday," he agreed.

And he did; but his manner of doing it only added insult to injury.

"Brethren," he began abruptly at the close of the sermon, "this church paid twenty-one hundred dollars last year, all told, for pastor's salary and general collections, and four hundred for church repairs. Of our two hundred members a hundred and fifty are children, or persons unable to pay anything. There was, therefore, an assessment of nearly fifty dollars a head. The sum collected probably amounted to more than these members pay in civil and municipal taxes."

You could have heard a pin drop when he paused for a moment, as if he was considering the next statement. Tom Warren was staring at him as if he had lockjaw.

"The burden this year has not been so great," he went on coolly, "for you have been able to save eight hundred dollars on the pastor's salary;

but the general assessments are the same. These amount to nine hundred dollars. Of this sum the various Sunday-school collections come to three hundred. You have, therefore, six hundred to raise for Missions, Home and Foreign, church extension, education, widows and orphans, hospital, and superannuates. I leave it entirely with your own consciences how much you pay.

"Brother Warren," he said, turning to the amen corner, "you and Brother Parks will please take the collection."

As the two stewards passed in and out of the pews we could hear nickels and dimes clinking together in the collection baskets. Brother Wade was entirely out of sight, seated behind the pulpit.

The amount collected was seven dollars and sixty cents!

"Thank you, brethren," said Brother Wade, rising to receive the collection. "We will sing the doxology."

A man can look in the face very much like a dog looks with his tail drawn between his legs. And that is the way the members of our church looked as we sneaked out.

"That's no way to take a collection!" snorted Tom Warren in deep disgust.

"He called your bluff though," I said, edging closer to him in the crowd. "After all the fuss

you've made about these collections, preferring charges against your pastor for neglect of duty!"

"Madam——" he began.

"Don't 'Madam' me, Tom Warren!" I interrupted. "I saw you drop a dime in that basket when you know and everybody knows you always give fifty dollars."

"But, Sister Thompson——" Sam Parks began.

"Don't 'Sister' me, Sam!" I cut in. "You put in but twenty-five cents! All because the preacher didn't stand up and crack jokes and jolly the money out of your pockets, as if the Lord's house was an auctioneer's hall!"

By this time we were upon the pavement. Brother Wade was still in the study behind the pulpit. And I held an impromptu open-air meeting for the benefit of the clergy so long as there was a single man or woman in sight.

It is not so bad to be a termagant in the name of the Lord, sometimes, if you know the right spiritual moment for staging the scene.

## CHAPTER VIII

IN NOVEMBER of that year a bishop, thirteen presiding elders, and four hundred itinerant preachers met in the principal Methodist Church of a town not twenty miles from Berton. This was the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, a strictly military as well as Christian organization, with the Methodist Discipline in use as the Manual of Arms. Therefore, this was in the nature of an autumn review of the cavalry and infantry of the church, where every soldier would be called upon to stand up for character inspection, then to tell what he had done for the Lord that year and how much money he had collected for the church. It is a good system, probably the best ever originated by any Christian church, but, like all systems, subject to strange abuses.

When the conference opened something like five hundred preachers, including superannuates, filled the house. It was not a "fine-looking body of men." They were not remarkable for the intelligence of their expression. Strictly of the fisherman type of Jesus' day I should say, or from

the ranks of society out of which most privates are taken, with an occasional sleeked-up city pastor or presiding elder among them, showing at a decided disadvantage in the rows upon rows of dingy Methodist itinerants, who indicated so plainly the hardships through which they had passed, the dull weariness of a long struggle, a little worsted in the fight as common soldiers will be, especially if they have fought the powers and principalities of darkness for a whole year with a mutinous church choir instead of a military band to cheer them on to the fray.

A house filled with men—tired, anxious men in rusty coats—is a sombre spectacle. One misses the mitigating circumstances of the flowers and feathers upon women's hats among the cropped heads and gray heads and the peeled-onion crowns of extremely bald heads.

But there was one foreign note, a row of men and women seated far back in the frigid zone of the church. This might be called a more or less violent quotation from the human scriptures of the Methodist Church at Berton. It was capitalized at the end next the aisle by Charlotte and Tom Warren and italicized at the other end by one Mary Thompson. Sam Parks, John Henry Lipton, and Roger Peters occupied the space between these two extremes. Charlotte wore her furs and

a full-blown red velvet rose with a black plume on her hat. She looked like a grenadier general who was about to break somebody's sword across her knees. I wore the same things I always wear, with my black quilted satin bonnet tied under my chin and my old fur cape which has been scalloped by moths round the edges. I had my spectacles adjusted so that I could poke my neck out, hold my head high, and thrust my chin well forward, which has always been the angle of vision I need when it is necessary to keep my eye on the situation.

Rumours were abroad concerning the church at Berton, always a storm centre by reputation in the Conference. Charges had been preferred against Felix Wade by one of the stewards. The other stewards and many members had sent in a written counter defense of the pastor. No one had ever heard of such a preacher in that conference. For it was established beyond doubt that he had privately contributed a large sum to the Red Cross work in the war zone. He had also maintained a hospital for typhoid fever cases at the factory near Berton, where there was not even a Methodist mission to explain his activities. He maintained this hospital by selling his very fine motor car. The inference was that he had private means, yet evidence showed that he had no means at all, and that

he had suffered for the actual necessities of life because the church paid less than one-third of his salary.

We were in the very spotlight of publicity, stared at from every angle and corner of the house, for we were recognized as members of this afflicted church, some of us come to defend, others to accuse this erratic man who as pastor had served faithfully, but had refused to hold a revival for our famished souls, and had taken the general collections at the last minute, apparently under protest.

If a pastor gives satisfaction he may be trusted to attend the Annual Conference without so much as a lay delegate as an iota subscript. But if three or four old Shanghai rooster stewards and a couple of elderly frizzly hen women show up from his church at Conference, this is a sign that there has been a row, and they have chased him, with wings dragging, to fight to a finish beneath the very nose of the bishop and in the presence of "all Christian people."

Promptly at nine o'clock the Conference was opened with the singing of

> *O happy day, that fixed my choice*
> *On Thee, my Saviour and my God!*

The old hymn rolled like a hallelujah cannonade against all earthly sorrows. Still no one looked

happy. Hymns, however, are not designed to express the joys you can see with the naked eye. So maybe these itinerants, dusty and tired from the long march of the year's gospel, were happy in their doleful way, just to be there for a few days' rest and to hope in a better appointment next year.

The bishop read a selection from the Sermon on the Mount. This was almost painful to us from Berton who had heard Brother Wade preach from these Scriptures so often without doing us much good.

Then we were led in prayer—not too close to the Throne of Grace. As I bent and wedged myself down between the pews with great difficulty, the spaces not having been designed to accommodate an opulent-bodied old lady, I could see us kneeling in the dust of our own spirits afar off, while the bishop had one knee up and one knee down far in advance of us, addressing the Lord like a "prince of the church" with sonorous phrases. I may be a barbarian or I may be a human democrat, but I never liked that term, a "prince of the church." There are no princes among the children of God. But the title has some vogue among Methodists of high degree.

I do not know if it was because I was so uncomfortable in that tight place, or if it was because I have a natural feminine spite at men—those who

exalt themselves upon their knees—but I began to get mad with that bishop, who was praying an unconscionably long time. I thought of something which happened to a little old blue-hen saint I knew years ago. She was a good woman with a fiery temper. She used to sell eggs and butter to a certain bishop's family. One day as she was about to leave the house the great man's wife said to her:

"Be careful as you go out, the bishop's on the porch. Don't make a noise. You might disturb him. He may be thinking."

The little old country-church Methodist seized her egg basket with one hand, her nose with the other, lifted her head high in the air and walked past the "prince of the church" as if she'd die before she'd smell a Pharisee.

By this time our bishop was barely getting started with his petition about what he wanted the Lord to do for the church. You might have thought the Methodist Church was the spiritual bobbin of creation, and all these preachers were only the thread wound on the bobbin. He didn't even mention them.

I'm not complaining. I merely say that old John Elrod, who lived and died a consistent member of our little church at home, could beat him so far in the eloquence and proper spirit of prayer that they were not in the same class. When John was

called on to lead in prayer he got down on both knees, then he bent his back very low, and put his bald head down so far you couldn't see even the red fringe on the back of it. Then he'd use some little simple words, very timidly, as if he were pulling gently upon the hem of the Lord's garment, just to let Him know he was very bad off and wished to speak to Him privately upon a matter of life and death.

By this time we all felt as if we were there close up beside John who was doing the talking for us. We were no longer men and women. We were little children who'd been doing wrong, fighting and scratching maybe, but our Heavenly Father, who knew from what mixed and dangerous dust we'd come, would surely have mercy upon us, seeing that we "wished to do better and be better," which was the simple way Brother Elrod always put it. Many a time I have risen from my knees feeling for the moment young and blessed as if I'd slipped the yoke of my years. But now when I struggled up and sat down at the close of that bishop's prayer I felt as if I were near to having a stroke of apoplexy.

Sometimes lately I've feared Felix Wade's influence has been bad for me. I'm still hungering and thirsting after righteousness, but I am not the blindly obedient church worker I once was. I only

obey because I do not know how to disobey without hurting my conscience. One's conscience becomes a fixed habit, like any other, and it's dangerous to try to change it in one's old age.

The next thing in order was the fixing of "the Bar of the Conference." This was a way the bishop had not exactly of separating the sheep from the goats, but it felt very much like that. All those who were not actually members of the Conference were requested to get up and get out, leaving more space for the preachers on the floor. We were assigned to a gallery which ran along the back of the church.

I felt very personal to myself, filing out along with the other Berton Church goats, for we were about the only people present who had to go. Charlotte thought she'd lead the way, but I backed out into the aisle on the other side and beat her to the gallery stairs, which I climbed in time to get a seat by the only window up there.

When I am in a house I always like to sit beside a window, even if the wind cuts under it like a knife, so as to make sure nothing escapes me on the outside which can be seen from the inside. This is important at our Annual Conference, because a good deal of the most secret work of the church is done privily upon the curbstone where two or three are gathered together. You

never see a presiding elder in these groups or any preacher who has won his spurs in the itinerancy and now holds the best city pastorate. Neither are they the circuit riders who never expect to get any but the poorest appointments. They are usually aspiring preachers, in the gratuitous employ of their own interests, or possibly they are sent out as scouts to test the feeling about such and such a man or to measure by some one higher up. But if you come back ten years later a good many of them will be elders and city pastors, sitting in the front of the house, doing a lot of conference business in the open, and carrying the administrative burdens of the church with great dignity and patience.

I could see some of these heirs apparent to prominent places working in and out, looking very honest and simple, as indeed they are. For nothing is more honest or simpler than proclaiming to the whole world what you seek while you are struggling to get it. I sat there watching them, chuckling a little to myself at the beautiful artlessness of these young preachers. I sympathized with them. There are souls to save everywhere. The harvest is as ripe, and even riper, in a rich church than it is on a poor circuit. These men had families to support. And they wanted better appointments for this very decent

"THE OVERCOAT OF A STRUGGLING METHODIST ITINERANT IS LIKELY TO BE FADED BY THE WEATHER OF LONG TRIPS THROUGH THE COUNTRY"

reason. Now and then one of them would start off down the street at a clipping, worldly pace, with his long, religious-looking, black coat-tails flapping behind him in the November gale. This meant he was the bearer of useful information to his elder or to some committee in session at another church. One thing touched me—so many of them were without overcoats. Not that they did not possess them, but the overcoat of a struggling Methodist itinerant is likely to be sadly the worse for wear, faded by the weather of long trips through the country, with the tail pockets invariably stretched out of shape by the things he brings home, gifts from generous members, such as a mess of spareribs tied up in dark brown paper, or maybe a dozen links of sausage carefully wrapped in a flour sack. Such a coat is no proper garment for the couriers of their superior officers, so they button their long-tailed preaching coats elegantly about them and try not to look cold in the bleak November weather.

Others may say what they please about these anxious young ravens of the Lord's ministry, but they have my full support and sympathy. It's knowing how to caw and flap their wings which attracts the attention of those higher up in the branches of the church. If I were a young preacher I would pray to my Heavenly Father

night and day to give me the faith of ravens, the harmlessness of a dove, and the wisdom of seven serpents for dealing with my bishop and his elders. There is no doubt at all in my mind that the Lord would answer such a prayer if it was necessary for the good of the preacher's sick wife, say, or that he might have a better school for his children.

There is probably no large gathering of men in the country, from an undertakers' convention to a bankers' association, which transacts business with greater dispatch than the officers of a Methodist Conference. They can have a discussion over the charter of some institution which belongs to the church, and get their own legal council free of charge by allowing their lawyer lay delegates to speak. They can get long reports from all the church boards, and from every pastor; take up fifteen collections; listen to seven sermons; place four hundred preachers, moving them back and forth over the state of Georgia and through all the districts, until the presiding elders are calmed if not satisfied with the ones they get. They can examine from ten to twenty applicants for the ministry, ordain a dozen deacons and elders, try two or three upon charges preferred against them, and do it all in time to take the early morning train exactly one week from the day the Conference meets.

As I looked down from the gallery upon that company of four hundred preachers my heart ached. Many of them were the victims of secret complaints made by their people to their presiding elder. The young ones were so diffident, fearful that they should not be able to pass their trial examinations, that the report they must make of their work would be unsatisfactory; and last, but not least, waiting in anguished suspense lest they should not get a better appointment another year, or fearing that they would lose the good one they had this present year. You may call it happy day, if you like, that fixes any man's choice on the Methodist itinerancy as his life's work, but my belief is that it is the parent of many sad days which no man could endure with the courage these men show if the Lord was not his shepherd through the valleys and shadows of these ever-lengthening circuits, as well as being with him beside the still waters in the green pastures. I've been in the church a long time, and I have not seen much still water and very few green pastures for a Methodist preacher. So, I say, my heart was with those dingy soldiers of the Faith down there on the conference floor, waiting with only the Lord knows what trepidation for their fate. There were self-seeking men among them, a few politicians, one or two Judases; but the overwhelming

majority of them were honest, faithful men, living more by the spirit than by the meagre quarterage they receive for their services.

Something like half a million dollars of the church's funds passes through the hands of these four hundred preachers every year. No one watches them, no one can possibly check up their accounts. Yet I have never heard of one who was accused of stealing, though he might be reduced to selling his books to keep food for his family. I doubt if this can be said of any other four hundred men gathered together haphazard as these are from every walk and condition of life.

I could hear from where I sat an old presiding elder making a plea for a preacher in his district who was ill and could not come to Conference. The bishop was suspicious—for the good of the church, of course. How sick was the absent brother—would he be able to take an appointment another year? The elder was for the preacher. He could not be sure he would be able to take work, but he earnestly advised that he should not be deprived of the chance. He was like a tender friend who lets a palsied man down through the roof, not to be cured, but merely to be fed.

There was another elder, shaped very much like Moab's washpot, who had been our pastor at

Berton when he was young and slender. I remembered pinning a red-flannel bandage under his chin and over the top of his head when he had mumps. He took everything hard—his religion, his work, and the mumps nearly killed him. Now he was one of the bishop's many right hands, a man who had gone as far as he could in the church without one blemish upon his reputation, except that he would not "take anything off of anybody." He was known upon one occasion to preach with a gun at his feet in a tent meeting which he held on a mountain moonshine circuit, when the distillers tried to run him out.

We could see another man, making himself very prominent, prancing back and forth from one front side to the other front side of the pulpit. He looked like a Thanksgiving turkey with a Roman nose, dressed in a Prince Albert suit.

William, my husband, could never bear this man, though William was the most forbearing Christian I ever knew. He said he was built too close to the ground. It was a queer description and didn't mean anything definite, but it fitted this preacher like the negative does a camera. Everybody knew him—a man who had gained prominence somehow by failing, with a great and righteous fuss, at everything he was appointed to do. His last fiasco was to split one of our

largest churches with a moral wedge that he'd driven into the board of stewards, which is no place to use violent methods morally. So now he'd been kicked up into a connectional office, where if he did no good he would do less harm.

It is remarkable how much alike all men look when they are sitting down with their backs to you, and you have no way of recognizing them by the length of their legs, which I have always said are the most prominent properties they have. For a long time I could not distinguish Brother Wade from the other preachers seated below. I was beginning to wonder if he was sensible enough to stay outside with the more progressive seekers of the church, when I discovered him by his upstanding cowlick. He was seated close against the wall, not too far forward and not far enough back to give the impression of being either sulky or embarrassed. I could not see his face, but the cross-legged comfort with which he leaned in his corner implied the repose of a detached listener and observer of what was going on. The entire length of the bench intervened between him and the next preacher who had apparently quarantined himself against this man in the corner, whose people had preferred charges against him, and who might be a heretic for all he knew.

This is one of the evils of a good but autocratic

church organization. The bishop and elders have power of life and death over these men, in that they can reduce any preacher to the ranks no matter how important a position he has held before, if he is suspected of disloyalty to the policies promulgated by the episcopacy, or if he shows too much sympathy with another recalcitrant brother. Some years ago a prominent presiding elder of this Conference wrote a book. This was not so bad, for many preachers do that on the sly, but they have the prudence never to publish them. This elder made the mistake of doing that. I never dared to read the book myself, but a good many people did, and it was said to have something in it about evolution which might be interpreted as a reflection upon the Adam and Eve accuracy of certain Scriptures. The next year the author was reduced from his eldership with a salary of perhaps three thousand dollars, to a little one-horse charge with a salary of less than a thousand. This is the very effective method of court-martial employed in our church. And why not? If you choose to be a Methodist itinerant it is your duty to abide by the doctrines and discipline of the organization. That little dried-up middle-aged preacher seated so discreetly remote from Brother Wade knew what he was about, and he was quite right to maintain a theological distance from an-

other preacher under suspicion—the bread and butter of his family next year might depend on that.

If I were a Methodist itinerant I would never use the word evolution. It is a bad word, more dangerous than any blasphemy. I cannot bear to hear it, especially in the pulpit. It makes the cold chills run down my back.

I began to understand why this was so as I sat in the gallery watching the members of that Annual Conference. Evolution is a psychic form of immigration. You are born and bred to one set of ideas, confirmed in one religious creed—ideas as warm and comfortable as the house in which you live—a creed stretched here and tightened there by long use and experience. Then, some day, you stumble upon the fact that your ideas are not yours at all, but inherited from other folk. Your roof begins to leak. You get the notion that you are a person, not a cell in a church organism. You desire to worship God according to the emergencies of your own particular soul. That is to say, you migrate, a very perilous business. You may become the victim of your own evolution. I sighed and thanked my Heavenly Father that there were very few, if any, Immigrants of this kind upon the conference floor. The most dangerous man in sight, I suspected, was Felix Wade. And he was

headed back toward the Beatitudes, which is not the direction usually taken by evolutionists.

One incident of this first session is impressed upon my mind.

The Annual Conference of the Methodist Church is as distinctly a masculine organization as a political convention. And it is likely to remain so long after women obtain the ballot and become national committeemen in a Presidential furor. No other organization in this world is so opposed to the recognition of women as the governing powers of the church. It is the worst example of taxation without representation, for probably two-thirds of the membership in every Christian denomination are composed of women.

I was just thinking of this, wondering at the neatness with which all reference to the service of Christian women was avoided, when some one handed a telegram to the bishop.

He opened it; then, looking up, he admitted slowly:

"A message from the Women's Baptist Union now in session at Savard, saying, 'John fifteenth chapter, fourth verse.'"

He had to find the reference and read it, though it was apparent that he had no use for John's Gospel in this connection. He flirted over the leaves of the Bible rapidly, and let us have it.

"'Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.' We will now have the report on education," he concluded, with not so much as the period pause between the reading of the quotation and the next item in the order of business.

I don't know that I have snickered out in church since I was a child until that morning, seated in the dark gallery above that Annual Conference, and that bishop so mad that he looked really natural and sinful. Every time I thought I was quieting down the artless humour of the situation laid hold of me again, and I'd go off in another paroxysm of scandalous mirth. Some old Baptist lady, her spirit perpetually damp with baptismal dews, her doctrinal soul wrapped round this favourite text of all Baptist preachers, had chosen it in defiance to send as a message to the Methodist Conference, or she did it in the simplicity of her heart, having no sense of the fitness of things. But the effect was awful and it was diabolically funny. So I held my sides and laughed, being the only person in the house who dared so much as bat his eye until the breach had been covered two pages deep by the report on education. Charlotte looked round once and spit at me with her eyes. This changed my mind from the Women's Baptist Union to her,

which is always a sobering line of reflection with me.

When we were all crowding out of the church at the close of the session I found myself wedged between a preacher whom I did not know and a presiding elder whom we used to have on our district. He said he was glad to see me there, and I said it was a great privilege to be there.

"Why is it, Brother Elks," I asked as we pressed forward toward the steps, "that nothing is ever said about the work of Christian women in the church!"

"Every preacher reports the condition of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies on his charge," he answered, as if that settled it.

"But I'm not speaking of that. We are also members of the church itself. We do a lot of work in it, the same kind which is duly reported when the stewards do it—they are even given credit for it sometimes when we do it," I explained.

Brother Elks was very busy trying to get through the jam of loitering, laughing, talking people. One might almost have thought he was fidgeting to escape.

"This morning," I went on, following him down the steps, "the pastor of the Grassdale Circuit below Berton reported two hundred dollars which we raised, he said, for repairs on the Grassdale

Church. That was misleading, dishonest. The we's who got that money were she's. The women earned and contributed every dollar of it with their chrysanthemum shows and festivals."

I knew well enough why that pastor did not tell who painted and repaired his church for him. He knew that neither bishop nor elders would have liked it if he had given credit where credit was due.

One night we had a great sermon from the greatest preacher and the most distinguished man in all Southern Methodism. The Conference took on a sort of glow. It seemed to me that some of the old men were exalted prophets, with their faces shining the reflected glory of the speaker's transcendent eloquence. I felt like shouting myself. Everybody was in the spirit, you might say, they were so moved and excited.

About the time the very heavens seemed to open, and we could almost see the angels ascending and descending, something happened. Two or three men arose from different parts of the church and made their way to the outer door.

"What do they mean, leaving at such a moment?" I whispered to Sam Parks, who was sitting beside me.

"They are rich laymen," he explained, grinning broadly. "The preacher's about to take up a big

collection. They are going down into the basement until it's over."

This is exactly what happened. That man who had stirred us with the very fires of the Holy Ghost now faced about and began to jolly the crowd for money he wanted.

I shall not tell what the cause was. It is enough to say that it was the enormously expensive project of an enormously rich church, requiring a very large sum.

During the next half-hour he collected several thousands of dollars from the Conference; that is to say, chiefly from the Methodist preachers—nearly all of whom are poor and more than half of them desperately poor. They may have wanted to give, but in any case they had to do it. Some of them saddled themselves with subscriptions that night which it would take them years to pay. There was much laughter and chaffing back and forth. Still, it was a holdup, pure and simple, and the highwayman was a "prince of the church."

I knew many of the preachers who were signing these subscription blanks. And I could see the poor little faded wife in some parsonage among the Georgia hills who had not had a new winter frock maybe for years, who had pinched and denied herself for her children and for her husband that he might have a new suit to wear to Conference.

I looked at Felix Wade—I thought he should be satisfied with this reckless generosity of the poor. But evidently he was not. He sat regarding the great man, who was squeezing them of their dollars down to their very dimes, with a deep frown between his eyes. I understood him well enough to know his thoughts. He would have approved if these itinerants had given the very coats off their backs, provided they gave to one poorer than themselves, but never to enhance the wealth of the church, no matter how specious the arguments employed to show how much the church needed what it really only wanted.

I climbed into the gallery on the fourth day of the Conference a few minutes later than usual. I was the only person there. Charlotte had gone back to Berton on the previous day. But where were the four stewards from our church? So far they had attended every session, giving their whole attention to what was going on. I knew they were still in town, for Brother Wade's trial would not be held until Friday, and Sam Parks, Lipton, and Peters had come to defend him against Warren's attack and to assure the bishop that we wanted him returned to Berton.

I was looking about over the Conference, thinking perhaps they had slipped in to get better audience of the reports and discussion, for we did not

always hear what was being said in the gallery. Suddenly I saw something which took my breath. I adjusted my glasses, bent far forward, and looked again. No, I was not mistaken. There was old Tom Warren seated beside Felix Wade, with his arm lying along the top of the bench and curved in an intimate, brotherly manner about Brother Wade's shoulders. The latter leaned a barely perceptible angle in the opposite direction. Warren was whispering and gesticulating in the most friendly manner. Brother Wade listened with a kind of smile, not cordial, nor yet bitter, but a sort of *requiescat-in-pace* smile, as if he were willing for anybody who wanted it to have the last word.

I leaned back mystified and strangely indignant, though I should have been glad to see those two men seated so close together in love and charity.

I happened to glance out of the window, merely, you may say, by way of cooling my thoughts, when I saw something else equally puzzling. The four Berton stewards were down there on the pavement with a presiding elder and half a dozen prominent preachers. Everybody was talking. Sam Parks worked himself in and out of the group, buttonholing first one man, then another. Lipton was also explaining something to the presiding elder, who would not listen. His manner was coolly accusative. Roger Peters joined in the

defense. You can look at a man and tell when he is on the defensive, even if you cannot hear what he is saying. They all wrangled back and forth before the curbstone audience, wagging their heads, spreading their hands, as much as to show how innocent they were of whatever they were guilty. Sam left the group, ran up the steps, evidently looked in. Then he came back, said something, and made an indignant gesture toward the church.

I thought he must have referred to Tom Warren, scrouged so close to Brother Wade, licking him with his long white beard, which was a sickening sight to us who knew how ruthlessly he had opposed and accused him.

The suspense was awful. The fact that one is a large almost spherical woman does not mean that one's mind cannot be elongated and hooked into a starved-eyed interrogation point. I felt exactly like that when Sam Parks came hastily up the stairs and seated himself behind me.

"Sam," I began at once, pointing to Brother Wade's companion, "what does that mean?"

"That he has withdrawn his charges against Brother Wade and is now apologizing for having made them."

I could see that Sam was jealous.

"But why did he withdraw them?" I asked.

"Because he's found out who Brother Wade is!" he answered, sneering.

"Who he is!" I exclaimed.

"Well, who he was, then, before he joined the itinerancy."

"A lawyer in New York. I've known that for some time," I answered.

"A congressman from New Jersey," he added.

"A congressman!"

I could not have been more astonished if he had called him a fallen angel from Paradise.

"Yes, a rich man, who has bonded his property and given the income to Christian charities!"

We sat a moment in silence, then Sam went on, hissing like a fire when you pour water on it—he was so mad.

"Warren says he's sorry he didn't understand Brother Wade better. He wants him to come back another year. He says if he'd only known that our pastor—he calls him that now with every public breath he draws—had funds to spend that way he could have directed him better, and great good would have been accomplished. But we won't get him back," he added regretfully after a pause.

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, the whole thing is out now; two or three city churches want him. I understand the Conference hopes to place him in charge of the hos-

pital work. But they may all miss what they are after," he concluded, smiling grimly.

"What are they after?" I asked.

"His money, of course. Rich, young-ruler type, you know. Didn't exactly sell all he had, but he has legally turned over the income for charity. The rub is that he belongs to the Belgian Relief Committee in A——, and most of it goes into that. Remember the mysterious trips he used to take, and what a fuss there was trying to find out where he'd gone and what he was doing?" he asked.

"Yes, though I can't say that I ever fashed myself that way about Brother Wade's private affairs," I said with dignity.

"Well," answered Sam, "he went to executive meetings of that committee. We've made a very serious mistake, Sister Thompson. There is no denying it."

"You've made a mistake, Sam Parks, you and the other stewards who failed to support him in his pastorate. I don't know what might have happened if it hadn't been for Molly Brown getting up food and stuff for him that last month!"

"We thought he had means of his own," he defended.

"I don't know what you thought, but what you did was to hold back his salary!"

"Well, it's too late now to do anything. Peters, Lipton, and I are going home this afternoon," he sighed.

"You'd better take old Tom Warren with you," I snorted.

And he did go, though Sam always insisted that they showed the back of their hands to him and let him know what they thought of him.

Every preacher's character must be passed before he is allowed to read the report of his year's work. When his name is called his presiding elder shouts back, "Nothing against him!"

But if there is something against him he shouts that, too.

When the name of "Edmund Pathe" was called by the secretary, his presiding elder arose and said: "There is a charge of immorality and maladministration against this brother. We are trying him now in the basement."

These words were distinctly audible in every part of the house. The victim was seated in full view, but no man looked in his direction. He was covered with this shamed charity of his brethren. The bishop went on with what he was doing, as if a man's honour had not perished in the breath of those words. Later we heard that he had "come clear" of the charges against him. But

will anything ever clear his reputation of that stain, so idly flung against him defenseless?

This can happen to any Methodist preacher, no matter how innocent he is. Charges may be made against him which fall upon him like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky when his name is called at the Annual Conference under question number twenty-two in our Discipline. As a rule he knows beforehand what is in the wind, but not always.

The fear of this awful publicity may constrain some preachers to live more discreetly and to be warily prudent toward the soul-sick lady who is the serpent coiled especially for them, just as the fear of everlasting torment drives some ruffian souls to seek forgiveness and membership in the church. But I never liked this kind of damnation gospel to sinners, and I do think the most brutal sight I ever witnessed was that presiding elder announcing grave charges against a man who looked as if he had died beneath the blow; and still stared in front of him with wide, horror-stricken eyes. And he was proved innocent, which must have increased his anguished sense of injustice.

My ear caught the name of "Walter Bliss." I remembered him forty years ago on the Berton circuit. He was young then, so young in his spiritual life that he still was joyful, radiating

courage, hope, and faith with no effort, simply because he was young, innocent, hopeful of a long life in the ministry. "Nothing against him!" shouted the presiding elder.

Then Walter Bliss stood up.

I should never have recognized this gray, withered shade of a man. All the hardships of the years, the weariness, the failures—they were written like an epitaph upon this scrawny figure, as if there had not been room for this sorrowful script in the wrinkles upon his brow. It was written all over him—in the sag of his shoulders, in his trembling knees, in his arms sticking out from his body like the picked wings of a bird.

He had not risen in the Conference, as we say. He had always been sent to the poorest circuits, where the labour was hardest, and the salary meagre to the point of dried fruit for quarterage. But for forty years when his name was called the presiding elder had always to answer, "Nothing against him!"

It is a long time to be good.

He read his report. He admitted that he had not been successful this year. One inferred that he never had been—only faithful. He was able to collect about 50 per cent. of his assessments. His salary had not been paid in full. He had held four revivals, but had not received many acces-

sions to the church. Yes, he had baptized quite a number of infants.

That was all, but still he stood, like a man collecting his feeble strength for a final effort.

"I wish to take the superannuate relation," he said, as simply as that.

He was done at last. He had gone down in the struggle. No more circuits, no more long journeys through snow and sleet to a church where maybe not three people came to hear him preach that day. Never again the struggle to get his paltry assessments, no more revivals with sinners crowding the altar with him, bending above, teaching them the great secret of penitence and love. Henceforth he would be only an old preacher with nothing more to suffer, and nothing more to do. It was awful to be so bereaved of his Lord's service.

He remained standing. He wished to say something about those forty years in the itineracy.

But the bishop did not see him. He called for the next report. Not a word of praise or sympathy for the man who had just finished giving his life for the church.

The old preacher slipped slowly back into his seat, looking vaguely confused. How had it happened? He was about to say something. But the bishop did not seem to know that.

Sometimes I know that I am not a sufficiently patient Christian. I know it with deep regret and a certain violent satisfaction. And this was one of the times. I wanted to jump up, lean over the balcony rail, and shout:

"Stop! That old man wants to say something. It's his last chance as a Methodist itinerant. Give him the floor and holler 'Amen!' for him."

If I had done that they would have removed me for disturbing public worship, I reckon.

But of course the bishop had his side. He was in command of a church conducted according to military ideas. When an old cavalry horse falls in the fight the general doesn't go down and close his dying eyes. He charges straight ahead, which is the right way if he is to get anywhere. But it certainly does look very bad to see him doing it in the church of God. I don't say it is wrong—I say it looks heartless.

As the names of the preachers are arranged alphabetically for this investigation of character, Brother Wade's name would come near the close of the session—for they managed to pass at odd times only thirty or forty each day.

On Friday morning they were as far down as the Smiths in the conference. There are several Ts, one or two Us and Vs, then before I could brace myself the secretary called, "Felix Wade!"

"Nothing against him!" responded the presiding elder.

Brother Wade stood up and read his astounding report.

This is made out on blanks, furnished with the printed heads under which reports are to be made. It is a good plan and saves time. The preacher is not supposed to wind himself or the Conference with explanations of why he did so well or so badly with his work that year. He is expected to reduce the whole thing to numerals, recite them and sit down, merely privately asking the Lord to have mercy upon him if he has raised only 10 per cent. of his assessments, which I reckon, until this day, was the lowest report of that kind ever made by a member of this Conference.

There was a curious stillness, a significant concentration of attention, as Brother Wade held up that little narrow cream-coloured slip of paper.

1. No accessions to the church.
2. No revivals held.
3. One conversion.
4. Sunday-school assessments paid.
5. Less than one per cent. of conference collections paid.
6. No salary assessed for pastor. Three hundred dollars paid.
7. Five infants baptized.

It must have taken him less than one minute to read these items. Then he resumed his seat, folded his legs, and left his cowlick to speak for itself.

The Bishop stared at him in petrified amazement. The members of the conference eased their necks round, as if they wished to resume a front-face position without being suspected of visual curiosity in this man who had just damned himself.

In the midst of this appalling stillness our presiding elder stood up.

"Bishop," he said in low tones, "Brother Wade desires to surrender his credentials and his license to preach. There is nothing against him, and he has stood with credit his examinations for the coming year."

This added assurance that there was nothing against him was important. If charges are preferred against a preacher he cannot surrender his license until after the trial. If he is found guilty the church demands them. So this was the earliest possible moment when Brother Wade could have been relieved of his duties.

The elder advanced, laid these credentials on the bishop's desk, and the incident was closed. The business of the Conference proceeded with the usual machine-like precision.

I sat like a poor old publican in the dark gallery, the only representative of the church at Berton,

which somehow I felt had been weighed in the scales and found wanting. We had had the light, and we preferred darkness, at least a well-shaded, world-tinted cover for our prayers and deeds.

Momentum gathered by more than a hundred years of progress will carry as large a body as a Christian organization a long way before it begins to wobble.

The great Methodist Episcopal Church South was certainly moving swiftly and directly to the ends it held in view—of being a rich and powerful influence chartered in the name of God—but I felt dimly that things were not so well with us as they should be. The atmosphere of an Annual Conference is not spiritual, because it is, strictly speaking, a business meeting, called to audit accounts and assign the work of the church for another year. All the fine sermons one hears at a conference do not entirely conceal the real nature and purpose of the body.

This is as it should be, of course. I am not complaining, I'm only explaining why I felt very low in my mind and very humble in my soul as I sat up there in the brown gloom of the balcony. I could not see the people on the conference floor below. My eyes were holden by tears which changed everything into a dark moving mist. I could still hear the sharp, incisive voice of the

bishop, saying something about church extension.

Then I heard the quick, elastic tread of some one coming up the steps into the gallery. The next moment Felix Wade slipped into the seat beside me.

We sat there in silence for I know not how long, with the rasping voice of the advancing church cutting the air as the bishop continued his exhortation.

"You have been good to me," Brother Wade said finally.

I fumbled in my reticule, took out my handkerchief and wiped the tears from beneath my glasses. But I could not stop my lips from primping.

"You have held up my hands," he went on.

I looked round at him and met the familiar, half-tender, half-humorous smile.

"We needed you, Brother Wade," I whimpered. "We are sorry to lose you."

"But I'll never lose you, dear lady. I'll remember you all my life as the fair weather of a hard season," he said gently. "I could not go without telling you that."

"But you are not going now!" I exclaimed.

"At once. I have an important engagement in A—— to-night. Lum meets me there," he said, rising and holding out his hand.

"You will not return to Berton," I held out, "to pack things?"

"No; that is already done—except"—he looked at me like a boy making a present to his grandmother—"except the painting which you remember hung over the fireplace in the parsonage parlour. I have ventured to bequeath that to you."

The next moment he was gone. I dropped back in my seat, feeling as a mother must feel after bidding her favourite son good-bye who is already on his way to the wars. And I could not comfort myself, because I did not know what would become of him.

The bishop was still speaking about the importance of church extension. But I thought I would get up presently, when I felt better, and go out. Maybe I should be able to catch the noon train for Berton. It did not matter whom we should get for a pastor—I made up my mind to let Charlotte run things next year. It was her kind of a church anyhow.

THE END

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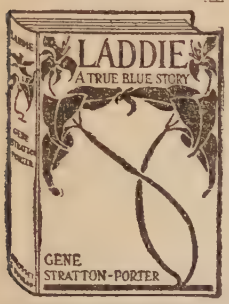


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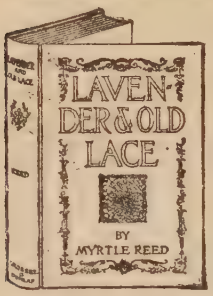


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